·THE WAR GOD·

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ISRAEL·ZANGWILL

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The war god.
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WITHDRAWN

THE WAR GOD BY
ISRAEL ZANGWILL

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
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TORONTO

THE WAR GOD BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS

NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY 1912

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Note

I CANNOT send "The War God" to press without recording my gratitude to Sir Herbert Tree, not only for the admirable cast with which he has interpreted the play at His Majesty's Theatre, and for his own beautiful performance of Frithiof, but also for more than one happy suggestion, and even line of verse struck out in the white heats of rehearsal, which on the well-known principle of Molière I have incorporated in my text. If I desire also to refer to Mr. Arthur Bourchier, it is less to add another to the countless tributes his impersonation of Torgrim has called forth than to thank my "Chancellor" for the generous praise he has publicly lavished upon the author of his being. And I am grateful to Miss Lillah McCarthy for lending Norna her polished art at a time when she was already playing ten performances a week.

It had been my intention to say a few words on the technical question of blank verse in modern plays, and to nail up the thesis that the Elizabethan use of a mixture of prose and verse makes but a hybrid art-form and that the lilt of metre should never be dropped even in the homeliest or most humorous episodes. But Mr. William Archer has anticipated my heresy in so spirited a defence that by his kind permission I reproduce his words here rather than multiply words of my own.

> All the great scenes of the play are, and ought to be, and cannot help being, rhetorical; why should the author deny himself the swing and resonance of verse?

"But," it may be said, "all the scenes are not 'great scenes.' In many of them the dialogue is quite commonplace and unrhetorical. Why should not they, at any rate, have been in prose?" Here, again, I unhesitatingly defend Mr. Zangwill. In spite of Elizabethan precedent, there is nothing more irritating on the modern stage than the drama which is couched in two mediums. It gives the verse passages an air of pompous self-consciousness, as though the author said, "Look you, now! I am going to be eloquent and impressive." As for the so-called "rhythmic prose," which is in fact bad and ear-baffling blank verse, it is an abomination. Mr. Zangwill did entirely right in adopting his medium and sticking to it; but—mark this!—he did right because he happened to have a peculiar art of writing smooth, easy, flowing blank verse, without contortions, without Elizabethan echoes. He makes the most ordinary talk (not even excluding slang) fall naturally and without incongruity into the iambic movement. I will go further and say that he uses the verse wittily—that he extracts from it some of the effects of emphasis, antithesis, and flashing rapier-play which a French dramatist extracts from the Alexandrine.

While fully sensible to this praise, I must yet permit myself the comment that the bulk of Elizabethan blank verse outside Shakespeare is as free from "contortions," as homely in homely situations, and as instantaneously intelligible to the man in the pit as my own, whatever the difference at high-water mark. The reverence for blank verse as for a medium debased by anything but the finest poetry is the mere superstition of the semi-literate.

I. Z.

November 20, 1911

Cast of the First Performance at His Majesty's Theatre on the afternoon of November 8, 1911

KING OF GOTHIA	CHARLES MAUDE
DUKE OF POMBERG	J. H. BARNES
COUNT TORGRIM	ARTHUR BOURCHIER
COUNT FRITHIOF	HERBERT TREE
BARON KONRAD	ROSS SHORE
OSRIC	BASIL GILL
KARL BLUM	GERALD LAWRENCE
BROG	A. E. GEORGE
SERVANT	HAROLD MELTZER
PRINCESS ELSA OF HUNLAND	LAURA COWIE
THE LADY NORNA	LILLAH McCARTHY
MARTHA	CLARA GREET

Revolutionists : W. B. Abingdon, Clifford Heatherley, Cyril Sworder

Lords and Ladies of the Court, Lackeys, &c. &c.

Overture, Entr'actes, Choruses and Incidental Music by S. Coleridge Taylor

Act I

The private study of COUNT TORGRIM, *Chancellor of Gothia, a large businesslike room on the second floor of the Chancellery, which is situated in Graaf, the capital of Gothia, at the top of a hilly street, so that through the great open casement in the back wall a range of snow mountains is seen looming on the far horizon in the light of a sunny September morning. The room is furnished with Spartan simplicity—a large central paper-littered writing-table, with revolving chair and waste-paper basket, a few hard chairs, rows of pigeon-holes and a locked desk on the right, belonging to the confidential secretary. A high screen stands horizontally towards the left of the back wall, hiding an old settee. The walls, where not occupied with pigeon-holes and maps of Gothia and the world, are lined with book-shelves containing heavy volumes and Blue-books, and decorated with portraits of the dynasty and of Holk, the conqueror of Hunland. A door at the back on the right leads to an ante-room, and a door at the side to a corridor giving on the house-keeper's region. In the left wall, up a few steps, is a door leading to a corridor and the Chancellor's bedroom. Over the mantel of the fireplace in the left wall is a painting of the Chancellor's dead wife, a sweet, sad-looking, middle-aged lady, with an expression of having been crushed by his rise to greatness. A perpetual light burns as a tribute beneath it. A large extinguished lamp stands on the table, and the only concession to modernity is a*

speaking-tube over the table connecting this sanctum with the busy bureau below. KARL BLUM, *the sole confidential secretary, is seated at the writing-table, opening and arranging correspondence and throwing envelopes into the waste-paper basket. He is forty-five, spare, and Semitic in appearance, with gold eye-glasses; he is very carefully dressed and wears a flower in his button-hole. Suddenly a shrill whistle vibrates from the speaking-tube. He starts up, annoyed, looking round nervously towards the screen, then speaks into the tube.*

BLUM
Don't whistle up—the Chief's asleep! . . . Yes, yes, I'll bring down all the documents by ten.
[*Steals on tiptoe towards the screen, and looks over*]
He's flame awake, asleep he's Polar ice.
[*Reassured, he returns to his work, takes up a long quill and dips it into the ink. The housekeeper's door opens and* MARTHA, *a motherly housekeeper of sixty-five, plump and well-preserved, appears. He exclaims testily*]
What now?

MARTHA [*Holding up eight fingers, breathes*]
Eight more have come.

BLUM
I cannot hear!

MARTHA [*Slightly louder, holds fingers higher, tiptoes nearer*]
Eight more—

BLUM

Stop pantomiming on your toes!
You will not wake him.
[*A babble penetrates through the ante-room door*]

MARTHA

But that cackle will!
The ante-room's areek with lordlings! Phaugh!
These new Court perfumes mingling with their breaths——

BLUM [*With an imperious wave of the hand*]
Clear it! And well for them the Dragon sleeps
Whose flaming jaws would snap their scented pates.
His mood last night was diabolical.

MARTHA
Not one will budge without the Master's ear.

BLUM [*impatiently*]
Well, let them know the Chancellor's abed.

MARTHA [*loudly*]
Not I! I keep his follies to myself.

BLUM [*Looks nervously towards the screen*]
Hush! Hush!

MARTHA [*Louder*]
Exactly! Would you have me blab
He snoozes on that mouldy couch of his
Like my late husband, sleeping off his beer?

BLUM
But 'tis a bout of work he's sleeping off.

MARTHA
So much the sillier. Why should rich men work ?
All night he slaved. He wearied out the stars.
Not one could wait to see his lamp go out.
At six I found him snoring like a pig—
[*Correcting herself at his glance round*]
I mean I found him sleeping like a lamb,
So drew the screen and——

BLUM [*waving quill with a gesture of dismissal*]
So you said before.
I'm busy.

MARTHA
So am I. [*Picks up the lamp.*]
Dear Osric's room
Must bloom with roses for his coming home.
'Tis you who chatter so.
[*A sudden spasm of quarrel comes from the ante-room.* BLUM *throws down his quill angrily and jumps up.*]

BLUM
I did expect
One hour at least of calm with all the Court
Meeting the ship to greet their future Queen.

MARTHA
God bless her ! [*Smiling*] But you see each gallant hoped
To earwig Master in the other's absence.

BLUM [*Grumpily*]
But Master might be prancing in the pageant
Beside His Majesty.

MARTHA [*Setting down lamp and settling to fresh gossip*]
They know too well
His love of lying low, though even I ne'er dreamed
He'd lie as low as that settee. Besides
[*Unrolling a long scroll from her pocket*]
The Order of Procession!

BLUM
Ah, of course.
[*Sits down and resumes quill and work.*]

MARTHA [*Forgetting herself as she surveys the scroll*]
God bless King Olaf and his beauteous——

BLUM
Hush!

MARTHA [*Reading ecstatically*]
First drums and trumpets, then with lance at rest
Ten princes on white horses, then the guards
In scarlet——

BLUM
Peace! As if this feather here
Had not grown leaden, plodding through it all.
Heigho! E'en this the Master stage-directs.
Nothing's too little for his mighty brain.

MARTHA [*Laughing*]
Except his nightcap. That is much too small.

BLUM [*Writing busily*]
Why don't you make a new one ?

MARTHA
Oh, good Lord !
As well expect him change his dressing-gown,
Or with electric-light replace this lamp,
Or take a second wife for her who died,
[*Looks at picture over the mantel*]
Or get a better secretary.

BLUM [*Hardly listening, but now startled*]
What ?

MARTHA [*Smiling*]
You know he fought against that speaking-tube.
He wants to-morrow to be yesterday.

BLUM [*Smiling*]
Oh, Martha ! How you sum the politician !
But you forget his zest for airships.
[*Sudden distant multiple boom is heard, re-echoed from the mountains.*]

MARTHA
God !
Is that a bomb ?

BLUM
You've bombs upon the brain.

MARTHA [*Wringing her hands*]
Oh! why was Brog the anarchist let out?

BLUM
For just the reason that those guns went off!
In honour of the landing——

MARTHA [*Excited*]
Oh, it's that!
The King has met his sweet Princess. Hurrah!
[*Joy bells begin to clash. Martha becomes uncontrollable.*]
God bless His Majesty! God bless his bride!
God bless the reign of Peace!

BLUM [*Sarcastically*]
God send it here!

MARTHA
He sleeps through guns and bells, he'll sleep through me.

BLUM
Best shut them out.
[*She closes the casement; the bells dwindle.*]
You too.
[*She goes out through her door, carrying the lamp.* BLUM *goes again to screen and looks behind it.*]
God! How serene!
A carven saint upon his worshipped tomb.
Who would divine a man of blood and iron?
What things of steel and flame he said last night!

I'll post my diary while they flash and burn.

[*He goes to his desk, cautiously unlocks it and extracts a black volume.*]

Full up! Have I a new one?

[*Finds one and writes*]

Volume twenty.

[*Startled at a noise behind the screen, he slips the book away, but reassuring himself that the Chancellor still sleeps soundly, he takes it out again and writes. Re-enter* MARTHA. *He exclaims testily.*]

Again?

MARTHA [*In awed tones*]

The Duke of Pomberg.

BLUM [*Equally impressed*]

Not the General? [*She nods.*]

The military governor of Graaf? [*She nods again.*]

His place is with the troops to keep the streets!

MARTHA

He tried to cross my palm with gold. But two
Doorkeeping rules of Master I hold holy—
Never to take a bribe or tell the truth.

BLUM

Let the Duke come. [*She goes.*]

What can the windbag want
So keenly as to scatter gold on Martha?

[*Enter the* DUKE OF POMBERG, *a blinking, moon-*

faced, pompous man in a Gothian general's uniform, with a cuirass and spurs. BLUM *rises and bows.*]
Your Highness honours us. Be seated, pray.

POMBERG
Pray, sit yourself. My horse fumes at the door.

BLUM
The Chancellor——

POMBERG
Keeps holiday, I know.
But I as lief would parley with yourself
[*With significant smile*]
Who are the trumpet to his deafish ear.

BLUM [*Looking round nervously at the screen, then with a forced smile*]
You may speak lower then. What shall I tell him ?

POMBERG [*Tendering a roll of notes*]
But first accept my best apology
For this intrusion on a gala day.

BLUM [*Refusing it*]
To serve your Highness makes a gala day.

POMBERG [*Pressing it on him successfully*]
Then keep it as a memorandum till
That grimmer gala day for Gothia's *foes*
When our great captain falls.

BLUM [*Surprised*]
The day Holk dies ?

POMBERG
God guard his life—it means perhaps our country's.

BLUM
But Holk is well and Gothia now at peace.

POMBERG
Is life a state of peace ? Our Caesar ages,
And death comes swifter e'en than Cæsar's marches.
One must take measures lest in that sad hour
Of scatter-brain when headless stands the army,
The Chancellor beset by candidates,
By scrambling carpet-knights, self-seeking, void
[*Drawing himself up pompously*]
Of genius, science, presence, magnetism,
Whose only skill lies in besieging him——

BLUM [*Rising nervously*]
You want the chief command.

POMBERG
Nay, it wants me.
The honour of the army needs *noblesse*.
Let civil posts be stuffed with parvenus.
[BLUM *looks round uneasily*. POMBERG *hastens to correct himself*.]
I do not mean your Chief—*he* rose to us
By real merit. . . . I must gallop back.
[*Going. At door*]

You need not say that I——

[*Hesitates. The bells heard clashing.*]

BLUM [*With discreet smile*]

My bell is tongueless.

[*Bows. Exit Duke through ante-chamber, from which a babble is still heard when the door is opened.* BLUM *counts and smells notes*]

This lucre is not filthy but fine-smelling.
My diary and I are both enriched. [*Writes*]

Distinguished visitor.

[*Murmurs into silence as he writes on, absorbed. A stir is evident behind the screen, and presently the* CHANCELLOR, COUNT TORGRIM, *gradually emerges, yawning, in a floral, greasy threadbare dressing-gown and old carpet slippers. The hair on his massive head is grey, and his strong face, without beard or moustache, is deeply furrowed with thought and work. He shuffles silently towards the table, then suddenly wrinkles his nose.*]

CHANCELLOR

I smell the Duke of Pomberg.

BLUM [*Startled*]

Eh ?

[*He drags a newspaper over his diary. Then turns.*]

You've woke!

CHANCELLOR

I smell the Duke of Pomberg. So he knows
Already that poor Holk——

BLUM

Not dead ?

CHANCELLOR [*Shuddering*]

God keep us !

The bells should not thus jiggle e'en to-day
Were our great soldier stiff. 'Tis that old fever.
I bade them hush it up—not spoil the day.
[*Takes out his snuffbox*]
The news came after you had dropped asleep.

BLUM [*Deprecatingly*]
It was my eyelids, not my will !

CHANCELLOR [*Clapping him affectionately on the shoulder*]

Poor Karl !

I saw the civil war betwixt the two.
You fought as hard as ever Holk in Hunland.
You should have used this powder.
[*Takes snuff, then sneezes*]
Tschew ! Not noiseless !
[*Chuckles.*]

BLUM
Methinks short sleep is better for your spirits.

CHANCELLOR
Why, Karl ! My son returns to-day from Hunland,
My Osric with his eyes of morning light,
And in his baggage Hunland's proud princess,
Labelled, " The King of Gothia ; this side up."

The minx's marriage welds our warring realms
In Christian peace, unites us to expunge
Perfidious Alba from the map of Europe.
Could but dear Holk bestride his old white horse,
This were my topmost day! Let's hear the bells.

[*He flings open the casement and leans out, listening to their louder chime.* BLUM *profits by the opportunity stealthily to lock away the diary in his desk. Then he goes to the* CHANCELLOR.]

BLUM
Too chill for you. [*Closes casement.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Sniffing*]
It cleared the ducal taint!
[*Raging suddenly*]
Curst civet-cat without the civet's spunk!
I'll drum him out of e'en his sub-command,
Dares he come crawling——

BLUM
Sha'n't I get your coffee?

CHANCELLOR
A rotten breed, these Pombergs, not the sap
Whence springs a soldier! What he seeks is honours,
Not honour, damn him! Deaf is he to duty—
God's trumpet-answer to life's dreary riddle.
Would Holk, think you, have won our war with Hunland
Without the faith that kept our fathers strong,
And based our Empire on the rock of Christ?

No, no—when Holk grows weary with the weight
Of war, a Christian shall succeed him—Osric.

BLUM
Your son! But he's so young!

CHANCELLOR
Napoleon
Played bowls with Europe's thrones at thirty; Cæsar
Was dead at forty-four. This reverence
For palsied age is but a modern folly.
Besides, dear Holk will live and Osric grow.
[*Going to his wife's picture*]
Ah, sweetheart, why could *you* not stay and watch
Our little rogue climb up, as swiftly as
He climbed the pear-tree in our cottage garden?
[*Wipes his eyes. Then gruffly*]
What's in my letters?

BLUM
Count, your breakfast first.

CHANCELLOR
I feed on news. How go the warships?

BLUM
Three
Will be delivered in the spring.

CHANCELLOR [*Pounding the table*]
Too late!
By God, I will not wait beyond this Christmas

To strike at Alba ! O these scurvy shipwrights !
To build on builders is to build on bubbles.
Command them double shifts, let night and day
Hear hammers ring that knell the island's doom.
These ships shall be the coffin of her glory !

BLUM
The guns are promised sooner.

CHANCELLOR
Good ! And airships ?

BLUM
They cannot guarantee safe voyages.
The newest bird-of-war is shipwrecked, sunk,
With all its hands, upon the air-sea's bottom,
Smashing its keel.

CHANCELLOR
Perdition !
[*Takes snuff furiously.*]
But the Press ?
It dances to my piping ?

BLUM
Merrily !
The talk is all of Europe's peace assured
By this conjunction of erst hostile realms
In holy matrimony. E'en the journals
We do not underprop intone Amen.
I almost feel our money thrown away.

CHANCELLOR [*Flicking* BLUM'S *nose playfully*]
Aha! The Jew lurks still beneath the wash
Of holy water. O my Hebrew godson,
Economy with editors is waste. The Press,
So great an engine for good government,
Becomes a peril in the People's hands.

BLUM [*Hiding his resentment, takes up other papers*]
But e'en the rags that hate you praise this union.

CHANCELLOR
Because I've made them think I hated it,
And that the Pope has wrought this work of peace.
[*Chuckling*]
He, he! I use their hate.

BLUM
You're wonderful.

CHANCELLOR
And Alba's journals? Still without suspicion
I only marry Gothia and Hunland
To crush them with a double army?

BLUM
Quite!
[*Passing him a newspaper*]
They seem as blind as all the rest of Europe.
'Tis cabled they rejoice with us and bless
This royal marriage, bringing peace on earth.

CHANCELLOR [*Chuckling and rubbing his hands*]
What will they say at Christmas when they find
Our wedding was their funeral . . . ?
[*With sudden transition as his eye falls on another newspaper*]
Damnation!
Who dared to change my phraseology?
And in our country's leading organ too!

BLUM [*Picking up a letter, deprecatingly*]
The editor explains he kept the sense.

CHANCELLOR
No, sir, he kept *no* sense: one altered word
Discolours all. To shape opinion needs
A sculptor's fine-felt touches. Tell the beast
I stop his subsidy if but one comma——
[*Chokes with wrath*]
Now in to-morrow's number bid him print,
As coming from his Paris correspondent,
My very words and not his tomfool——
[*Enter Martha with tray of coffee, bread-and-butter, and an egg. He stops short.*]

MARTHA [*Severely*]
There!
Your Excellence need not roar—I've brought it twice.

CHANCELLOR [*Mildly*]
I was not roaring—not at least for breakfast.

MARTHA
Well, breakfast is a remedy for roaring.
[*Stands tray on table while* BLUM *clears away papers.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Pinching her cheek*]
You should have wakened me at six as usual.

MARTHA
Thank God I'm not so silly as my master.
You're not the first child I have nursed. Sit down.
[*Pressing him into chair and tying on his napkin.*]

CHANCELLOR
This coffee smells delicious—after Pomberg.

MARTHA
Then let me see you drink—that I may run
To catch a bit at least of the procession.

CHANCELLOR [*Taking up cup*]
Ha! Which of us is now the child? [*Exit* MARTHA]
Good soul!
[*As he talks he drinks and eats with a peasant's uncouthness, speaking occasionally with a full mouth.*]
Our Gothia stands on such sweet, sturdy women.
Your mincing jades, in shape an hourglass—pah!
Praise God, I've found our lovèd sovereign
A buxom bride to bear him bouncing children.
You know the curse with queens is they are—women.
They love to play the angel of mercy. Gad!

How many war-plans have these meddlers marred!
But Princess Elsa is not sentimental.

BLUM
You have not seen her?

CHANCELLOR
No, but I have seen
Her pedigree. Prize stock—a bulldog strain.
Our princes will be fighters. Which reminds me.
When will *your* boy be baptized?

BLUM
Sunday week.

CHANCELLOR
I must be there. [*Pats his shoulder*]
Dear Karl, it warms my heart
To see my saving of your soul reach out
Unto the second generation.
[*He picks up a newspaper.*]
I suppose
You'll call him Isaac.

BLUM [*Flushing, startled*]
Isaac?

CHANCELLOR
After you! . . .
To hell!

BLUM
What now?

CHANCELLOR
Read that!

BLUM
"Count Frithiof"?

CHANCELLOR
Curse him!

BLUM
"Has taken up his staff and is *en route*
To see the King; and everywhere the peasants
Gather to crave his blessing."
[*The* CHANCELLOR *snatches at the paper and tears it up.*]
You'll arrest him?

CHANCELLOR
Will *that* arrest him? No! That's Pomberg's way.
Better arrest the King.

BLUM [*Amazed*]
The King?

CHANCELLOR [*Smiling*]
Keep *him* shut up
Against the madman. You're as dense as Osric.
God bless my pair of lambs—no sense of humour!

BLUM
I've more than your belovèd spy in Alba.
Look at his letter—and, forsooth, in cypher!
A huge concern is formed, your gossip writes,
To buy the fields round Eastport, there to grow
[*Explodes into laughter*]
Tomatoes!

CHANCELLOR [*Alarmed*]
What ?

BLUM [*Laughing on*]
Such vegetarian perils
Demand indeed a sleuth-hound . . . !

CHANCELLOR [*Springing up*]
Silence, fool !
This means another port to land our soldiers.

BLUM [*Taken aback*]
Tomatoes, not *torpedoes !* Look !

CHANCELLOR
Torpedoes
Throughout the harbour would guard Alba less
Than miles of glasshouse blocking up those fields
Across which Holk and I have oft in fancy
Galloped our cavalry to Alba's heart. [*Fuming*]
The map ! The map of Eastport !
[BLUM *brings it from a special pigeon-hole. The* CHANCELLOR *groans.*]
As I thought !
We can't invade them there. Unless our airships——
[MARTHA *runs in, excited.*]

MARTHA
O Excellence, they're coming here !

CHANCELLOR [*Looking up vaguely*]
Here ? Who !

MARTHA [*Waving scroll, confused*]
The King, his bride, the princes on white trumpets—
I mean the great procession is to pass
This way.

CHANCELLOR [*His face grows black*]
Who dared to change my route ?

MARTHA
The King !
The King himself, to do you honour. Look !
How swift the mob comes flying at the news
To seize the street.
[*Confused hum of a multitude approaching.*]

CHANCELLOR [*With a tremulous, beautiful smile*]
You see, if you had waited——
[*He snuffs himself, then wipes away a tear*]
O Karl, this touches me. To think that he,
God's chosen sovran of our ancient realm,
Whose blood flows royal for a thousand years,
Who incarnates the spirit of our race,
And that dread mystery of majesty,
Should think of *me* on this his day of days—
Of me, a humble yeoman's son !

MARTHA
Nay, more !
He's coming up.

CHANCELLOR
What's that ?

MARTHA

To bring his bride.

CHANCELLOR

The devil! I'm not shaved!

MARTHA

Nor dressed.

CHANCELLOR

Not dressed?

[*He feels his dressing-gown, becomes conscious of his slippers, and, shedding them as he goes, rushes from the room, up the steps, and through his door.*]

MARTHA [*Calling after him as she hurriedly throws things behind screen*]

You see what comes of sleeping like a heathen!
Even our street's not dressed to meet its monarch.
That table, too, unshaved—a ten days' growth.
[*Clearing off litter*]
Why, God forgive him! Here's his egg uneaten.
[*Taking things on tray and going to door of ante-room*]
Way for our future Queen! Make way! Avaunt!
[OSRIC, *a tall, soldierly figure of some thirty years with a spiritual face, rushes from the ante-room, almost into her arms.*]

OSRIC

O Martha, what a welcome!

MARTHA

Osric! [*Drops tray.*]

OSRIC [*Catching it and kissing her over it*]

Saved!

But where's my father?

BLUM

Welcome home!

OSRIC

Ah, Blum!

[*They shake hands*]

His Majesty, aware I was a-yearn
To hug my father in sweet privacy,
Deputed me his herald.

MARTHA

You're too late.
I brought the glorious news: he's shaving. Stay!
[OSRIC *is rushing in*]
Or he'll forget his sovereign in you!

OSRIC [*Returning obediently*]
Dear father!
[*Exit* MARTHA *to her kitchen*]
Blum, was ever such a day
Of holy happiness! Those dreadful wars
Are laid for ever. Oh, I'm young again,
Almost as young as father, whose stout heart
Was never torn like mine by doubt of God.
'Twas I who feared that Frithiof dreamed in vain.

BLUM
You saw the naked fighting!

OSRIC

That is true.
Father ne'er saw the earth a charnel-heap
Whose sun was but a bloodshot eye, whose moon
A blanchèd stare at leagues of bleaching bones.
But yet when every home in Gothia wailed
Its dead, and mother died of wanting me,
He might have well lost faith like me. But no!
He knew the world of poets would come back,
Grass, sea, and sky a-shimmer with that radiance
Which is the lovelight in the eyes of God.
He held this war the path to lasting peace,
And grimly he ensued it.

[MARTHA *re-enters unmarked, and continues tidying up*]

Was it not
A rare revenge upon my faithless moods
To send *me* on this embassy of peace?

BLUM [*Drily*]
Your father always was ingenious.

OSRIC [*Moving nearer his father's door*]
God! What a giant! All we others—dwarfs!

BLUM [*Murmuring*]
Or puppets!

CHANCELLOR [*Without*]
Is that Osric's voice?

OSRIC

O father!

[*He rushes up the steps.*]

MARTHA [*Angrily*]
O lather! You'll be slobbered, face and coat,
With soap and tears and kisses.
[BLUM, *picking up documents, is following* OSRIC]
You go too?

BLUM
I told the bureau I——

MARTHA
What! I alone
Receive the King!

BLUM [*Smiling*]
I'll send you Osric back.

[*Exit* BLUM. *The noise of procession nearing, bands, horses trotting, troops.* OSRIC *hurries back.* MARTHA *stops him and wipes faint soapsuds off his face ere he goes out through ante-room; then with a sudden thought she goes to a drawer, takes out stars and other insignia, and exit towards the bedroom. Marshalled pompously by* POMBERG *and headed by the elderly* BARON KONRAD, *the Chamberlain, a procession of lords- and ladies-in-waiting enters, which lines up on either side to receive the King. Most conspicuous of these ladies stands the* LADY NORNA, *a beautiful girl with a rather shy, sweet expression. She wears a red scarf thrown over her shoulders, and seems to be particularly friendly with* BARON KONRAD, *with whom she talks sotto voce. Finally* OSRIC *re-enters backwards, bowing in reception of the young* KING OF GOTHIA, *who is in a gorgeous cavalry uniform, and the* PRINCESS ELSA OF HUN-

LAND, *a spirited-looking lady in magnificent driving costume. As the royal couple enter, the band without is heard playing the Gothian National Anthem, and all bow or curtsey.*]

OSRIC
Your Majesty must pardon——
[*The Chancellor's door opens*]
Ah, he comes!
[MARTHA *is seen pinning the last star on the impatient* CHANCELLOR *as he issues from his door, sticking a large strip of plaister to his face. He has changed to Court costume, and wears white gloves and a sword.* MARTHA *remains peeping through the door.*]

CHANCELLOR
Forgive me, Majesty!

KING
You've cut yourself.

CHANCELLOR
A scratch! [*Bowing low*]
Thrice welcome, royal lady!
[*Half to himself*]
Gad!
You're lovelier than I bargained for.
[*All smile; the* PRINCESS *is pleased.*]

KING [*To the* PRINCESS]
Behold
That giant brain and soul whose sleepless toil

Built one great Gothia out of shards of States. . . .
Heavens ! [*Sensation among courtiers*]
You wear your latest order wrong !
[*Awesome pause. The courtiers are thrilled. The* KING *graciously adjusts the error*]
My sainted father loved him : I account him
The greatest part of my inheritance,
And my own pride, no less than gratitude,
Impelled me in your earliest peep at Gothia
To show you her chief glory.

CHANCELLOR [*Breaks down*]
Majesty !

PRINCESS [*Extends her hand, which he kisses blubberingly*]
Count Torgrim, I am prouder hence to rule
O'er you than all the kingdom else. In Hunland,
In those sad days now dead, thank God ! and dim,
When our two realms in needless warfare clashed,
It was not Gothia's vaster armaments
We grudged her : not her frowning fortresses,
Nor legions coiling like an endless snake,
Nor monstrous armoured ships and massy guns,
But you—you only.

CHANCELLOR
Madam, you forget [*Points to portrait*]
Holk was the man—if you must talk of war—
Holk led those legions, ay, and steered those ships ;
Holk's was the brain of ice, the heart of fire ;
Holk ploughed your towns and blew your ships to h——

KING

Count!

This is no fitting hour to harp on Holk.

CHANCELLOR [*Aflame*]

It is the hour Holk tosses in that fever
Caught in the Hunland marshes. Damn my soul
If I stand by and——

[*Recollecting himself, bowing his head humbly*]

Pardon, Majesties!

KING [*Coldly*]

This festal day, when prison doors are opened,
Our royal pardon gives itself more lightly——

CHANCELLOR

Not on *such* grounds, sire, do I ask it. Nay,
You know I deprecate this prison-vomit
Which floods the realm with anarchists like Brog.
The gallows is the best triumphal arch!

PRINCESS

You man of iron!

POMBERG

There is sentiment!

[*Pompously drawing himself up*]

I take the full responsibility!

CHANCELLOR [*Glaring fiercely at the Duke*]

And will your anarchists show sentiment?
'Twas brutes like Brog who splashed the bridal dress
Of Spain's young queen with blood——

KING [*Shocked and offended*]
Enough !

POMBERG [*Inflating chest again*]
I take——

PRINCESS [*Changing conversation tactfully*]
So this is where you spin your grim designs.
What secrets lie beyond that mystic screen ?
What mighty web of State is weaving now ?

CHANCELLOR [*With bland irony*]
No web but one of filmy gossamer
To lap your reign in fleecy folds of peace,
And swathe you softlier than the summer air
Enslumbers earth with leafy lullabies,
Till in your rich, delicious drowsihead,
Your sweet, faint sense of bees and swooning roses,
Holk's iron deeds grow dim as ancient dreams.
In brief, we touch those promised days when lion
And lamb shall lie together.
[*To* BLUM, *who has entered above the staircase with papers*]
Eh, dear Blum ?

BLUM
Shall lie together. [*He goes back uneasily.*]

OSRIC [*Involuntarily*]
Dearest father !

KING
Thanks !
We go the happier for this fresh assurance
The world is bettered by our happiness.

CHANCELLOR
Let my escort amend my tardy welcome.

[*Trumpeters in the corridor sound; he precedes the* KING *backward. The Gothian Anthem starts again. The procession files out,* POMBERG *flirting with a maid-of-honour. All go except the* LADY NORNA *and* BARON KONRAD, *the elderly Chamberlain, the latter of whom, marshalling the procession out, contrives to remain a moment with her.*]

CROWD [*Without*]
Long live the King! Long live the Princess Elsa!
Long live the Chancellor! Hurrah! Hurrah!

NORNA [*Whispers excitedly*]
What heavenly luck! Go cover up my absence!

BARON [*Sotto voce*]
What would you do?

NORNA [*Sotto voce*]
Map out the monster's lair.

BARON [*Sotto voce*]
What need? Brog knows already how a bomb——

NORNA
Bombs spatter death upon the innocent
And graze the guilty. No, this man of iron,
[*Takes up a steel paper-knife*]
Accursèd arch-priest of the God of War,

Demands an individual doom.

[*Leaves the knife quivering in the table*]

Go, Baron!

[*He goes out through the ante-room. She examines the table, and finding nothing but documents in cypher, tries* BLUM'S *desk, but it is locked. Then she steals cautiously up the steps and turns the door-handle.*]

MARTHA [*Entering from her door opposite*]
Sweet lady, here's the door.

NORNA [*Smiling*]
May not one see the shrine of Gothia's hero?
A single peep were worth a life's remembrance!

MARTHA [*Smiling back*]
No doubt you *would* remember till your death
His bedroom, like a chamber after earthquake,
But that is not on show. As for his staircase,
'Tis bare as bones.

NORNA
There is a private staircase?

MARTHA
Only to dodge the leeches stuck on this.

NORNA
You comic creature!

[*Turns door-handle again*]

MARTHA
No, 'tis strict forbidden.

NORNA [*With fascinating smile*]
For fear we pilgrims filch mementoes ?

MARTHA
Nay,
But in these days of anarchists and bombs
Some red-scarfed ruffian——

NORNA [*Laughing*]
Why, *my* scarf is red.
[MARTHA *and* LADY NORNA *laugh merrily together. Enter* OSRIC *hurriedly from ante-room.*]

OSRIC
Ah, Lady Norna, the Princess is asking——

NORNA
A jest delayed me.

OSRIC [*With lover-like emphasis*]
Would that I had shared it !

NORNA
That were indeed the grimmest jest of all.

OSRIC
You grow more mocking and mysterious daily.
[*Booming of another royal salute heard*]
The crowd is dangerous—pray, take my arm.

NORNA [*Evading his arm*]
A woman's safer if she goes *un*armed.

[*Both laugh. Re-enter* CHANCELLOR *and* BLUM. *The* CHANCELLOR, *chuckling low, watches with a gesture of paternal benediction the laughing exit of the couple.*]

CHANCELLOR
A merry mating to our turtle-doves !

BLUM
You mean these two to pair !

CHANCELLOR [*Rubbing his hands*]
Why else did I
Enship them to escort our coming Queen ?
A ship's a matrimonial agency.
Eh, Karl ?
[*Digs him in ribs in high good-humour*]
What say you to the match ?

BLUM
Like all
Your recent combinations, 'tis prodigious,
And robs me of the breath wherewith to say !

CHANCELLOR
Well said !
[*Slaps him on the back*]
So you approve my choice of daughter——

BLUM [*Smiling*]
Of Gothia's fairest maid and mightiest heiress ?

CHANCELLOR
Pooh! What to me are wealth or beauty? Say
Her blood is ducal!

BLUM
Well-nigh royal!

CHANCELLOR [*Vehemently*]
Ay!
My grandsons shall not rank one inch below
That putrid Pomberg's. I shall found a house
On firmer rock than parvenu Count Torgrim—
Nay, nay, I know what's said behind my back!
I'll twine our stem round Gothia's oldest trunk.
There's only one small drawback. [*Sits at table.*]

BLUM
What is that?

CHANCELLOR [*Absent-mindedly draws out the paper-knife sticking in the table*]
The Lady Norna is an anarchist.

BLUM
Good God!

CHANCELLOR [*Smiling*]
Why not? My son's a Socialist!
Dear little doves that play at being hawks.
It is the riot of their springtide blood,
The riot meant for mating, which I still
By pairing them, so in their happy cooings,
Nest-buildings and soft gurglings o'er their brood,
They learn to leave the world's affairs to God.

BLUM [*Drily*]
And you!

CHANCELLOR [*Quietly*]
And me, His earthly servant!
[*Lays hand affectionately on* BLUM'S *shoulder.*]
There!
You now possess my sole surviving secret.

BLUM
But how did you discover Lady Norna's?

CHANCELLOR
By reading Baron Konrad's correspondence.

BLUM
He too?

CHANCELLOR
The philosophic species—harmless;
Or rather, useful.

BLUM
What! A spy at Court!
CHANCELLOR
Precisely, spies for *me!* Brog writes to him.
I know their code.

BLUM
He's leagued with Brog!
CHANCELLOR
Most handy!

How else could I remain in touch with Brog ?
That's how I caught the brute—though fools have loosed him.

BLUM
And I imagined I knew everything !

[*The* CHANCELLOR *slaps* BLUM *on back in high glee and bursts into Homeric laughter, which is suddenly interrupted as* MARTHA *enters from her door, carrying a telegram. The* CHANCELLOR *sniffs like a war-horse scenting battle.*]

CHANCELLOR
Ha !
The answer from the shipyard !
[*He snatches it*]
Quick ! The cypher !
[BLUM *brings the code while the* CHANCELLOR *is snapping fingers impatiently over the telegram. They both bend over the code*—BLUM *transcribing. The* CHANCELLOR *gives a triumphant cry*]
Aha ! The dogs have yielded !

BLUM
No, indeed.
For double speed they ask a million more.

CHANCELLOR
And what's a million with the world at stake ?

BLUM
The world?

CHANCELLOR [*Feverishly*]
Write, write "Agreed." Not babble echoes.

[BLUM *writes the reply telegram, consulting code again. The* CHANCELLOR *hands it to* MARTHA.]

Here, give the messenger—nay, he may loiter.
Take it downstairs and tell a secretary
To seize the line.

[*She is running out through the ante-room, he pulls her towards the staircase, leaving the ante-room door ajar.*]

You snail! Through here is quicker!

[*Exit* MARTHA *with comic gesture.*]

BLUM [*Sullenly*]
The fate of Alba cannot hang on clock-ticks.

CHANCELLOR [*Sharply*]
Had Blucher lingered, what of Waterloo?
Each second counts. . . . Run after her and add:
"Another million if another cruiser."
We'll raise new taxes. Bustle, bustle, blockhead!

[BLUM *hurries up staircase*]

Once Alba's vanquished, Europe's at our feet,
And have we Europe, then—

[*Runs after* BLUM, *snatching up the cypher book*]

The code, you camel!—

[BLUM'S *hand takes it and disappears. The* CHANCELLOR *finishes his sentence with unctuous slowness and triumphal loudness*]

Then the world is ours.

[COUNT FRITHIOF, *a noble white-bearded figure in a peasant's smock and leggings, leaning on his staff, appears at the ante-room door, left open by* MARTHA.]

FRITHIOF
What shall it profit a race to gain the world
And lose its soul ?

CHANCELLOR [*Turning in amaze*]
Why, what are you ?

FRITHIOF
My name
Is Frithiof—maker of peace it means, you know.
[*Enters.*]

CHANCELLOR
Of course ! Of course ! That peasant's masquerade !
I should have recognised the crazy Count,
Who, having squeezed life's pleasures dry, blasphemes
Against his rank, sex, country, king and God.
Sir, were you sane, I'd ask how dared you enter.

FRITHIOF
Sir, were *you* sane, I had no need to enter.
But for your sake and Christ's I left my hut
And tramped to this mad city and this mad house,
Where you, a passing shadow, dare to forge
God's thunderbolts and doom a brother-nation.

CHANCELLOR [*Amazed and angry*]
Why, who has told——?
[*Stops. Another royal salute booms.*]

. . . Poor Count! Do you not know
To-day is Gothia's feast of peace and love?

FRITHIOF
I hear the cannon booming peace and love.
Poor soul! I came in love to bring you peace,
That peace of God which passeth understanding.
Why squat here spinning crafty labyrinths,
Jetting your filthy network o'er the globe?
You think to bind the future? Poor grey spinner!
Fate, the blind housewife, with her busy broom
Shall shrivel at one sweep your giant web
And leave a little naked scuttling spider!

CHANCELLOR [*White with passion*]
Be dumb, sir! Hence! Lest I forget our years!

FRITHIOF
Nay, best remember them—how near to death!
Go, wash your hands of blood and make you clean
For the last robing!

CHANCELLOR [*Advancing threateningly*]
Out, you graveyard owl!

FRITHIOF
Lift not your hand on me who love you. Smite
Your enemy—yourself! Your iron heart
Smite till it melt to take the stamp of Christ.

CHANCELLOR [*Fiercely*]
I *am* a Christian.

FRITHIOF

Nay, a fiend who'd float
His warships on the tears of mothers, build
Our glory on a million graves.

CHANCELLOR

Enough!

[*Lays hand on sword*]

Madman or clown, such words you must defend!

FRITHIOF

Touch not your sword. I do not fight.

CHANCELLOR

You shall!

[*He deliberately removes his glove and smacks it in challenge across* FRITHIOF'S *right cheek. The* COUNT *silently turns the other cheek and stands with calm eyes of love. The* CHANCELLOR *drops the glove and staggers back a little. The curtain falls, then rises to show* FRITHIOF *picking up the glove and handing it courteously to the* CHANCELLOR.]

Act II

An afternoon at the end of the following May. The scene shows a stone terrace with embrasures in a royal castle some fifteen miles from Graaf, overlooking a wide shining river which comes winding in sunshine from the snow-mountains in the background. Below the parapet, which is crowned at intervals with grotesque stone griffins and other fabulous monsters, runs a broad stone seat, in whose embrasures cushions are disposed. A small cushioned seat stands towards the left. An exit on the right leads to the interior ; the grounds are reached through an archway giving on an old oaken door on the left. The LADY NORNA *sits reading to the* QUEEN. NORNA *looks pale ; the* QUEEN, *who wears a loose-flowing robe, is peevish. A faint sound of military music comes from without, and there are occasional bugle-calls, giving a sense of the pervasive Gothian militarism.*]

NORNA [*Reading from a magazine*]
" Sad maidens shut from sunshine and from love."

QUEEN
Now comes the rhyme with dove. How poets lie !
Rhyme steals their reason—kiss must lead to bliss
Instead of headaches . . . tell all moping maidens
They must be glad, not sad. . . . Pray read no more !
I'll turn the pictures. [*Stretches out hand.*]

NORNA [*Retaining magazine*]
Madam, there are none
. . . Unless mere snapshots.

QUEEN

They at least are true.

[*She takes the magazine and turns pages languidly; then bursts out again*]

Look at that river dancing in her diamonds!
I call it heartless of her.

NORNA

Heartless, madam?

QUEEN

Are she and I not sisters come from Hunland,
From Hunland's hills—the far blue hills of Hunland?
She might have worn a sympathetic black.
Heigho! To flow back, back unto my hills!

NORNA

Shall I not sing to you?

QUEEN

There are no songs
But lying love-songs. . . . Have *you* ever loved?

NORNA [*Confused and blushing guiltily*]

I, madam? No.

QUEEN

Yet you, unlike a queen,
May love a man and not a policy,
And have a son and not a State-creation
Swaddled in parchments. . . . So! I wondered why
You got this magazine.

NORNA [*Flushing more furiously*]
Your Majesty!

QUEEN
But Osric is far prettier than that!

NORNA
Young Torgrim's picture there? Ah, yes, of course!
A mere appendage to the Chancellor's!
He gave it me to read his father's praises.

QUEEN [*Laughing*]
A novel way to give a girl one's picture!
Upon my soul, the rogue dispels my vapours!
He'll have you struggling in his net before——

NORNA [*Rising*]
Madam, this talk of love displeases me
As song or tale of love your royal self.

QUEEN [*Rising even more angrily*]
Indeed! A queen and may not have her jest!
'Tis little else I am permitted here.
What next?
[*Hurls magazine over the parapet and walks towards her rooms.*]

NORNA
Shall I attend you, madam?

QUEEN [*Furiously*]
No!
Can I not even walk without a wardress?

I'll send for Osric and prolong my jest.
[*Recalling her royal dignity*]
We are displeased.
[*Exit majestically.*]

NORNA [*Leaning over the parapet, calls as to far below*]
Ho, sentinel! Her Majesty has dropped
That book among the reeds. Pray send it up.
[*She stands looking towards the river. Enter* BARON KONRAD *from the castle. He comes up behind her.*]

KONRAD [*In low tones*]
Why came you not to council on the mountain?
We waited till the moon grew white again.

NORNA
I could not slip away.

KONRAD
A thousand pities!
Our comrade Brog had planned a *coup*.

NORNA [*Listlessly*]
Indeed?

KONRAD
It needed gold.

NORNA
Command me!

KONRAD
'Tis too late!

With but a hundred hirelings shrewdly scattered,
Brog would have seized to-day to make a rising.

NORNA [*Faintly interested*]
To-day ?

KONRAD
The opening of Parliament !

NORNA
Ah, yes !

KONRAD
The triumph of the People's candidates,
The surging mobs to view the King's procession,
Here's touchwood for the flame—and for the match
The news I spied out that the royal speech—
Though slurring o'er that Torgrim has been building
Beyond his means a fleet to rival Alba's—
Foreshadows taxes for new armaments.
You do not listen.

NORNA [*With a start*]
Yes, new armaments.

KONRAD
And does that match not fire you too ? I thought
To see war-beacons shooting from your eyes.
Why, what has changed you ? Can it be that Osric ?

NORNA
How dare you, sir ?

KONRAD [*Smiling*]

Ah, now I see the beacons!
I only meant your converse is so copious,
Perhaps his views——

NORNA [*Scornfully*]

His views! A parrot's views!

KONRAD

Precisely what I meant—his father's views.

NORNA

'Tis not his father whom he apes, but Frithiof.
Resist not evil—fighting's wrong, and so forth.

KONRAD

One Frithiof seems to make a many fools!

NORNA

Osric's no fool—philosophers should weigh things—
But just a child, too credulous of good,
And with a child's trust in his father.

KONRAD

No fool to love both Frithiof and his father?
To be a soldier and to call war sinful?

[*Enter through the archway a powdered and gilded lackey, carrying a muddy magazine on a silver salver.*]

NORNA

Ah, sir, the human heart contains four chambers,
So surely there is room for contradictions.

LACKEY
Too muddy for your ladyship.

NORNA
Why, no!
Tear off the cover!
[*The lackey gingerly removes cover, fearing to stain his white gloves.*]
There! Quite stainless! Thanks.
[*She takes the magazine. Exit lackey carrying the dirty covers on the salver.*]

KONRAD
No doubt the seat of folly *is* the heart! . . .
But Osric's brainlessness avails us!

NORNA
How?

KONRAD [*Lowers voice.*]
Because we need not kill him with his father!

NORNA [*Dropping magazine*]
Kill *him?*

KONRAD
I said there is no need. [*Picks it up.*] But if
The man of iron left a son of steel——
[*Gives her the magazine; she takes it with shaking hand*]
Why, you are white!

NORNA

I did not sleep. I pray you——

[*Turns away.*]

KONRAD

I'm sorry. But remember it was you
Who dragged me from my theories to join
To Brog's crude courage and your gold my brain!

NORNA

Why this reminder? Have I flinched a moment?
Can I forget my oath to war on war,
Made and renewed on twenty putrid fields
Areek with blood and sulphur and agape
With hasty pits where mothers' sons were piled
Pell-mell and nameless!

KONRAD [*Staring*]

How have you seen fighting?

NORNA

Have you forgot our nine years' war with Hunland?
I was once captain of the Red Cross Army.

KONRAD

Indeed? Those days I was so busy writing
My Peace-Philosophy——

NORNA [*Scornfully*]

And so you thought
Me merely nourished on your secret writings
Like that young parrot on Count Frithiof's works?

No! No! My deep-set hate of Governments
Had redder root in Hunland's sodden soil,
When in the train of Butcher Holk I sped,
After the war had doubly orphaned me.

KONRAD
Doubly? I knew your father's heroic death——

NORNA
Heroic! That's a word I guard for mother,
Dying at home upon the rack of doubt,
And with no cry save Gothia and glory!
Ah, me! Her shadowed sweetness, tear-dimmed grace!
Not mercifully widowed, wedded rather,
Instead of husband, to a silent fear
That sat with her by day and lay by night.
Not you, but those slow-creeping, shrouded years
When we three, mother, I, and that grey shadow,
Kept house together, sowed the seed matured
On Hunland's battlefields. Ah, God! the pictures,
Corpses and carcases, that in my brain
Are ever mingling in a blood-red mist
Whence hollow groans resound and horses' screams
That sting my soul to blow the world to pieces!
And strange to say 'tis horses more than men
Obsess my days and dreams—the poor dumb horses
We spur upon the maddened horns of war
And disembowel for no ends of theirs.

KONRAD [*Coldly*]
All this—without the crudity of contact—
You might have gleaned from my Philosophy.

NORNA
I found a simpler Peace-Philosophy—
Cut off the heads of war and war collapses.
'The peoples hate it, monarchs are but pawns,
'Tis always statesmen—heaven save the mark!
So death to statesmen!

KONRAD
So you did persuade me.
But now 'tis you who seem to shrink from——

NORNA
No!
Let's leave the Court and burrow in the mountains
With Comrade Brog!

KONRAD
Nay, Brog is better served
By our connivance here.

NORNA
It seems like cheating.

KONRAD
All's fair in love and——

NORNA
Hist!
[*Enter* OSRIC *from the castle hurriedly.*]

KONRAD
Why, what's this haste?
You wear a cloud.

OSRIC [*To* NORNA]
I came to say good-bye.

NORNA
Good-bye ? Why do you flee her Majesty ?

OSRIC
The telephone has summoned me to Graaf.
There's some uprising !

KONRAD
What !

NORNA
Uprising ? Whose ?

OSRIC
Some anarchists, I think—the telephone
Was fuzzy at this distance, but the voice
Was Blum's, directing, in my father's name,
I haste defend the capital. Thank God
For motor-cars ! In half an hour——

KONRAD [*Hurrying into the castle*]
Here's news !

OSRIC
Stop ! Do not tell the Queen !

KONRAD
Am I a fool ?
I go to telephone for fuller facts.
[*Exit.*]

NORNA
You must not fight.

OSRIC
Not fight ?

NORNA
You said 'twas sinful.
Let pagan soldiers do it. Where is Holk ?

OSRIC
I do not know, but I must do what's ordered.

NORNA
A pretty follower of Frithiof ! Fie !

OSRIC
Think you my conscience is not torn enough ?
But some contend we may resist the evil
Aimed not at us, but others !

NORNA
How men quibble !
I never knew a man of single will.
Even your Christian steers 'twixt God and devil.

OSRIC
My father promised me an end of wars.
But this is not his fault. How can I leave
The palace at these lawless ruffians' mercy ?
Just think ! *You* might have been within !

NORNA

What then ?

OSRIC

What then ! Then how could I *not* fight ? My God !
Were foul hands laid on you, I'd kill myself !

NORNA [*Touched. Half smiling through tears*]

And make bad worse. How strange are men !

OSRIC

What's strange ?
How could I live without that aureole
Which playing round your head makes all things holy ?

NORNA [*Frightened*]

Go, go—your duty calls you—go, good-bye !
There's no such nimbus round my head, while in it
Are thoughts which you would be amazed to know.

OSRIC

Not I ! Do I not know how white doves flit,
How morning dew lies fresh upon the grass,
What fairy fragrance breathes from hawthorn buds ?
O Norna, dearest Norna !

NORNA [*Faintly*]

Touch me not !

[*She droops into his arms.*]

OSRIC

Fear no profaning—I am in a shrine !

'Tis adoration draws me nearer still,
And in an ecstasy of reverence
I bend towards you thus.
[*His lips just rest on hers. She tears herself away.*]

NORNA

No, no, not thus!
This is no time for idling.

OSRIC

You are right.
Some magic perfume drowsed my brain. Good-bye!
[*Hurries towards oaken door.*]

NORNA

Good-bye—good-bye—and never come again.

OSRIC

Not come again! Oh, Norna, see, my feet
Come of themselves!

NORNA

They are your enemies.
[*He advances*]
No! No! *We* must not think of love.

OSRIC [*Dazed*]

Not think——?

NORNA

I have my work to do.

OSRIC

What *is* your work ?

NORNA

Enough that it divides us—like a sword.

OSRIC

Divides us, dearest ? Nay, I'll help you.

NORNA [*Shuddering*]

God !

You know not what you say. . . . It is your father.

OSRIC

Father !

NORNA

Who stands between us.

OSRIC [*With boyish relief*]

You are wrong !

His praise of you sounds oftener than our bugles.

NORNA [*Grimly*]

I would he were more silent ! Go ! Forget me !

OSRIC

You used to mock me laughing, now 'tis crying.
And yet you say 'tis men are strange.

NORNA

Pray leave me !

[*A bugle-call heard without.*]

OSRIC

My duty I obey—not you!

[*Exit.*]

NORNA [*Yearning after him*]

O Osric!

[*She picks up the magazine and lets herself fall on the stone seat, pressing her face against his picture. Re-enter* BARON KONRAD]

KONRAD

O glorious news! Most glorious! Holk is shot!

NORNA [*Turning a dazed face*]

Holk shot!

[*Rising slowly like a somnambulist*]

Shot! Butcher Holk!

KONRAD

Stone dead.

NORNA

Stone dead!

[*As the news fully penetrates her brain, her face is transfigured, she stands upright with flashing eyes, the magazine clenched in her hand*]

That Titan of Artillery is shot!

[*Half-consciously tears up the magazine at every line*]

Whose cannon spat at all our hopes is shot!
That sportsman with the biggest bag is shot!
The Butcher Holk is butchered! Then indeed
The Judgment Day begins!

[*Hurls magazine fragments over the parapet*]

Who fired the shot?

KONRAD
Why, who but Brog ?

NORNA
Oh, how I envy Brog !
But more ! Oh, tell me more !

KONRAD
'Twas while the crowd
Stood waiting for the King's return in state
From Parliament. Holk sat his old white horse,
Heading the pageant. Suddenly there spread
Two evil rumours—one the tax for warships,
And one the King had shirked his state return—
In fact had sneaked away. The cheated mob,
Inspired by Brog, put one and one together,
And made eleven—that he feared to meet
His tax-crushed subjects.

NORNA
And it looks eleven.

KONRAD
Seizing this sullen moment, Brog took aim !

NORNA
Vive Brog ! That shot will rank with William Tell's !

KONRAD
Thank God it may ! for with the death of Holk
The pall of terror that has hung o'er Graaf
Was rent, and with a roar of glee the mob

Made for the palace. Some built barricades,
And some with flaming torches sought the convents—
And there the story stops !

NORNA

But how can *you ?*
Let us go down——

KONRAD

To see ?

NORNA

To fight !

KONRAD

What folly !
We are the brains behind !

NORNA

Yes, far behind !
Brog's brusque performances outshoot and shame
Our long-laid projects. . . . Hist !
[*Loud and with feigned laughter*]
O Baron !
[*Re-enter the* QUEEN, *rather angrily*]
Madam,
Can I do aught ?

QUEEN What have you done with Osric ?

NORNA [*Indignant*]
Am I your Osric's keep——

KONRAD [*Hurriedly*]
His father, madam,
Called him to Graaf upon some public business.

QUEEN
The Chancellor ! Again the Chancellor !
Always the Chancellor !
[*Enter the* DUKE OF POMBERG *by the archway*.]

POMBERG
Not always, Madam. You are now beset
Only by worship.
[*Bows low, arranges cushions*]
Will you sit ?

QUEEN [*Pettishly*]
No, stand !
POMBERG
Most fit ! Of old stood lovely statues here,
And I, at risk of sounding treasonable,
Could wish you fixed for ever like Lot's wife.

QUEEN [*Sweetly*]
Dear Duke !
[*To* NORNA]
Why do you smile ?
NORNA
Lot's wife was salt !
QUEEN
Pray leave me with the Duke !
[NORNA *and* BARON *bow and exeunt within in animated conversation.* QUEEN *sits*]

Why are you not
In Graaf, escorting your liege sovereign
To Parliament ?

POMBERG [*Resentfully*]
Ah, Madam, that's precisely
What brings me from the joyous bannered city
To seek redress. My place by blood must be
The pageant's head, but lo ! the Chancellor
Stuck up his crony Holk on plea the people
Must see and cheer their hero after sickness !

QUEEN
Count Torgrim's finger seems in every pie.

POMBERG
I would not say, were he a real Count,
Or e'en a gentleman, or had he talents——

QUEEN [*Rising suddenly*]
What is that red that glimmers on the sky-line ?

POMBERG [*Following her gaze*]
Most strange—too soon for sunset.

QUEEN
There are fires
Not lit by God.

POMBERG
'Tis some mirage !

QUEEN
Go see !

POMBERG [*Going*]
Fear nothing, madam. Is not Pomberg here ?

[*Exit through the archway. The* QUEEN *stands gazing anxiously at the line of red. The* KING, *in the uniform, glittering with orders, in which he has opened Parliament, enters, and seeing her rapt he steals behind her on tiptoe and flings his hands round her eyes.*]

KING
Three guesses !

QUEEN
Fool ! You should not startle me !
Who but his Majesty would dare—or be
So inconsiderate ?

[*The* KING *removes his hands, crestfallen*]

No, do not kiss me !
You're wondrous early.

KING
I escaped the crowd—
A side-door and a common motor-car !
Such haste methinks deserved a warmer welcome.

QUEEN
But was it wise to disappoint the people ?

KING
They had their hero Holk—and bands and banners.

QUEEN
Ah Holk, I gather, got more cheers than you.

KING
Not more. My head still feels nid-nodding.

QUEEN
How
Did Parliament receive your speech ?

KING
So-so !
New taxes seldom rouse enthusiasm.

QUEEN
Then why propose them ?

KING
Ask the Chancellor !
You speak as if I wrote my speech myself !

QUEEN
Long live the clockwork king with phonograph !

KING
Hush, Elsa ! You are come from happy Hunland,
Where Parliaments, new-fledged, more fall than fly.
Your royal sire is King and Pope in one.
But look how other kings are led in leash
Before you murmur at my freer fate.
I can make war and peace and——

QUEEN
You ! Good lack !

You blind yourself—if me you failed to blind.

[*With a sudden mischievous inspiration she puts her hands round his eyes*]

Three guesses! Who makes war and peace?

KING

Why, I!

QUEEN

Guessed wrong! Who married us?

KING

The Pope!

QUEEN

Still wrong!

Last guess. Who chose my maids-of-honour?

KING

You!

QUEEN

Then I pack Norna off; she's blasphemous!

KING

But, Elsa dear, the Chancellor——

QUEEN

Correct!

In four!

KING

You mean——? Absurd!

[POMBERG *hurries back*.]

POMBERG

Your Majesties,
They say it is a convent burning.

KING [*Surprised*]

Where ?

QUEEN
That rim of fire !

KING [*Looking towards it*]

How sad an accident !
Count Torgrim must compose a Royal message.

QUEEN
Since women are concerned, 'twere best from *me !*

KING [*Icily*]
The King includes the Royal consort.

QUEEN [*Flushing*]

So !
I knew my status here was less than nothing,
My only function to produce the heir !
[*She throws herself sobbing on the cushions.* POMBERG *begins stealing out.*]

KING
Hush ! Pomberg is discreeter far than you.

QUEEN
Why, let him hear ! Does not the whole world gabble?
Is not the date the journals' speculation

Beside a horse's prospects or a stock's ?
Does not your Press collect for christening-cups
In hopes you'll knight the Jew-proprietors ?
Are women not subscribing silver rattles
Or some such lewd reminder ?

KING [*Seizing her hand*]

Dearest Elsa,
It is their love, their loyal——

QUEEN

Let me be !
I want no love that puts me to such shame.
My God ! a cat may have its young in private !
[*She flings out hysterically. The* KING *calls to* POMBERG, *who is just cautiously disappearing.*]

KING
Don't go ! I have been praising your discretion.

POMBERG
Most royal sire, I am a married man.
These periods are distressing.

KING [*Sitting*]

Let us talk
Of lighter matters. Why did you not hang
Count Frithiof ?

POMBERG

It was Torgrim set him free,
And bids me still ignore his treason-teaching.

I said : who talks of kings as " sinful mortals "
Corrupts the source of order (see St. Peter),
Nay, seats himself upon a rival throne,
And even puts himself above the Chancel——
[*Pretends to bite his tongue.*]

KING
Nay, speak !

POMBERG
It was a slip.

KING
I love the truth !

POMBERG
Your Majesty, the rumours that Count Torgrim,
Backed up by Holk, designs Dictatorship
Are, in my judgment, mischievous inventions.
But—ne'ertheless——

KING
You mean—if not in name—
Torgrim usurps my place !

POMBERG
Not only yours.
Graaf's safety lies upon *my* shoulders, yet
He frees this Frithiof demagogue whose gospel
Would turn our soldiers from their pride of arms.

KING
But why does Holk not shoot the madman down ?

POMBERG
Holk! Holk! The man is feeble after fever,
And at his best was but a tool of Torgrim.

KING
That scarce does justice to his victories.

POMBERG
With such resources you or I had won them!

KING
Not *I!*

POMBERG
I call "your Majesty" "your Modesty."
Who plans a ballet can arrange a battle.
God, who has giv'n you every gift—save godhead,
If you will pardon a rude soldier's bluntness—
Has granted you what e'en Napoleon lacked.
Did you not show me why he lost at Leipsig?

KING [*Pleased*]
Well, well—I thank God most for giving peace.
[*Death-bells begin to toll faintly afar*]
What's that?
[*They strain their ears to the horizon.*]

POMBERG
It sounds like death-bells.

KING
Ah,
Those poor burnt nuns!
[*Enter the lackey.*]

LACKEY

His Excellence Count Torgrim
Craves audience!

KING

Here? Methought to-day at least
I'd done enough of State-work. . . . Bid him come.
[*Exit lackey*]
The nigger-driver!

POMBERG

Oh, your Majesty!
Let me dismiss the brute.
[*Hurries towards door*]

KING

No!
[POMBERG *bows and goes to other exit. The* KING *calls him back*]
Stay with me!
Mayhap he's vexed I cut the pageant short.

POMBERG

Sire! If that bulldog barks before my sovran——
[*He puts his hand on his sword and draws himself up bombastically; the* KING *likewise stiffens himself as if to receive cavalry. Enter by the archway the* CHANCELLOR *with dragging step, an old, weary man, clad in Court dress, with sword, and bearing the seal of State in its cardboard box.*]

CHANCELLOR

Your Majesty!

KING

Why, what is ill with you ?

CHANCELLOR

I come to lay my seal within your hands.

KING

Resign ?

POMBERG

Resign ?

[*His eyes light up eagerly. His hand half unconsciously takes the seal.*]

KING

But why ?

CHANCELLOR

I am unworthy.
I have not kept your capital in peace.
Besides, Holk's death has broken me.

KING

Holk's death ?

CHANCELLOR

You do not know that Holk is foully murdered ?

KING

Great God !

POMBERG [*Less outraged than pleasantly agitated*]

How ? How ?

CHANCELLOR [*In tears*]
That soul of chivalry,
That saint who saw in war God's highest service,
That prince of bold emprise, the people's idol,
And more his soldiers' father than their chieftain,
My old yoke-fellow . . .
[*Half fiercely*] Sire, have you no word
Of thanks for him to warm this wintry bosom ?

KING
I spoke of him but now—his mighty deeds.

POMBERG
And I ! His place will be with Julius Cæsar's.

CHANCELLOR
Ay, and like Cæsar he is butchered !
[*Covers his face. The bells heard tolling*]
Ha !
All Gothia's death-bells toll as I enjoined.
The humbler dead will profit by his honours.
You see he serves his fellows dead as living.
But I am jealous there should be in Gothia
A heart to-day with room for other grief.

KING
Yet I must send a message *re* the nuns.

CHANCELLOR [*Puzzled*]
Which nuns ?

KING
The dead !

CHANCELLOR

But why nuns only ?

KING [*Looking towards the red line*]

Are

There other victims ?

CHANCELLOR

Christ receive their souls !

The fighting——

KING AND POMBERG [*Involuntarily placing their hands on their swords*]

Fighting ?

CHANCELLOR

I'm bemused to-day,
Or I had guessed you still in peaceful darkness.
The revolution——

KING

Revolution !

POMBERG

Christ !

This comes of letting Frithiof out.

CHANCELLOR [*Leaping into sudden vitality and thunder*]

Not so !

This comes of letting out those gallows-birds,
Your Brog and Co., against my solemn warning,
The day our royal lady——

KING [*Coldly*]
These are bygones!
Back to the city, Pomberg, take your place!

POMBERG [*Shrinking*]
My place is here to guard your royal safety!

CHANCELLOR [*Drily*]
There is no need for Pomberg! Osric's gone.

POMBERG [*Recovering his fierceness*]
You sent your stripling o'er my head?

CHANCELLOR
How so,
If here's the place of glory? And indeed
I fear yon rim of blood upon the sky
Portends the rebels are advancing.

POMBERG
God!
This castle was not built to be a fortress,
And powder fails us!

CHANCELLOR [*Grimly*]
They will blow up less.
[*Singing of "Marseillaise" heard afar, courtiers heard running to and fro and ladies screaming.*]

POMBERG
Oh, let me bear your Majesties to safety!

KING [*Taking the seal from his outstretched hand adn turning to the* CHANCELLOR]
I cannot take your seal at such a moment.
I pray you——
[*Tenders seal back.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Taking it, holds it uncertainly*]
Sire, how *can* I guard the State
When every scurvy scribe and Socialist
May all unpunished flout me and my taxes!

KING
But Parliament has passed them!

CHANCELLOR
Parliament!
Five hundred babblers chosen for their skill
To gull the fifty million simpler fools
Yclept the People. 'Tis a true King's duty
To save the People from the Parliament—
God strike it dumb! Sire, had your hallowed father
Not bid me plant my heel on Parliament,
Grim Hunland's heel would be to-day on Gothia,
Parliament and all——
[OSRIC *runs in breathlessly through the archway,* BLUM *more slowly behind him.*]

OSRIC
O father!
[*The* CHANCELLOR *turns with black surprise.* OSRIC *perceives the* KING]
Pardon, sire!

KING
Speak! Speak! Your face shows better tidings.
Speak!

OSRIC
Sire, glorious and the hand of God! But Blum—
With me 'tis hearsay—Blum will tell it better!
Our cars half-way to Graaf well-nigh collided!

BLUM
Your Majesty, except stray gangs still roam
The suburbs, Graaf is peaceful—thanks to Frithiof!

OMNES
To Frithiof?

BLUM
He before the palace sudden
Was seen prophetic with uplifted hands,
Bidding both parties throw their weapons down.
His standing thus serene 'twixt double fires
With brow of thunder and with eyes of love
Wrought strangely on the superstitious mob—
I mean we Gothians are at root good Christians!
In vain Brog marseillaised—his spell was broken.
He fled to the hills.

OSRIC [*Enthusiastically*]
So Frithiof is our saviour!
And we have brought him up to see the King.

CHANCELLOR [*Thunderstruck*]
You've brought him up!

IOSRC

Ay, and the people press
To kiss his garment.
[*The* CHANCELLOR *makes a movement of protest.*]

KING

I should like to see him.

OSRIC [*Going towards archway*]
Count Frithiof! Long live Frithiof!

VOICES [*Outside*]

Long live Frithiof!
Long live Count Frithiof! Long——!
[*Enter* FRITHIOF, *a little blood dabbled on his forehead.*]

FRITHIOF [*Turning in rebuke*]

Nay, long live Peace!
Its blessing on you, King!

KING
I thank you, Count, for loyal service.

FRITHIOF
I bring you service yet more loyal—Truth!
[*Murmurs of protest from the courtiers.*]

KING
Nay, let him speak. Has he not bled for me?

FRITHIOF
Not for you, King, but for the famished mob
Your troops were shooting down. That's government—
When people ask for bread to give them tombstones!
Brog's way is evil, but his cause is just.
[*More murmurs.*]

POMBERG
Rank anarchy!

FRITHIOF
Your people faint beneath
The tax for warships.

KING
Warships keep them safe!

FRITHIOF
The path of safety is the road to ruin.
This monstrous impost bulking vaster yearly
As rivals pile up armaments and debts
Must bankrupt all.

CHANCELLOR
What do *you* know of figures?

FRITHIOF
Enough to read the Day of Reckoning.

CHANCELLOR
Dear Count, who've proved yourself our prop and bulwark,
We must protect our growing commerce.

FRITHIOF

Nay,

Our growing conscience.

KING

True.

CHANCELLOR [*Getting angrier*]

Our growing people!

We need new homes for our expanding breed.

FRITHIOF

Our breed expands not in your Afric swamps;
It builds its own homes—in America.

CHANCELLOR

Yet e'en our Afric swamps are coveted.
To safeguard peace we must prepare for war.

FRITHIOF

I know that maxim; it was forged in hell.
This wealth of ships and guns inflames the vulgar
And makes the very war it guards against.
How often, as the mighty master said, the sight
Of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done!

KING

Did I say that? How true!

[BLUM *turns aside with a suppressed laugh.*]

POMBERG

How wonderful!

CHANCELLOR [*To* KING]
You meant it otherwise.
[*Turns furiously to* FRITHIOF, *righteous indignation sweeping away craft*]
Ill deeds forsooth!
Count, you blaspheme against the God of War,
Great Mars, whose priests in shining armour danced,
Whose service still is jubilant and splendid
With glory of faith and high heroic deeds!

FRITHIOF
The God of War is now a man of business—
With vested interests.
[*The* CHANCELLOR *is about to protest.*]

KING [*Puzzled but arrested*]
Expound yourself.
FRITHIOF
So much sunk Capital, such countless callings,
The Army, Navy, Medicine, the Church—
To bless and bury,—Music, Engineering,
Red-tape Departments, Commissariats,
Stores, Transports, Ammunition, Coaling-stations,
Fortifications, Cannon-foundries, Shipyards,
Arsenals, Ranges, Drill-halls, Floating Docks,
War-loan Promoters, Military Tailors,
Camp-followers, Canteens, War Correspondents,
Horse-breeders, Armourers, Torpedo-builders,
Pipeclay and Medal Vendors, Big Drum Makers,
Gold Lace Embroiderers, Opticians, Buglers,
Tent-makers, Banner-weavers, Powder-mixers,
Crutches and Cork Limb Manufacturers,

Balloonists, Mappists, Heliographers,
Inventors, Flying Men, and Diving Demons,
Beelzebub and all his hosts, who, whether
In Water, Earth, or Air, among them pocket
When Trade is brisk a million pounds a week!

KING [*Overcome. The death-bells are heard again.*]
Then where's the hope this trade in death will die?

FRITHIOF
There *is* none while this social order lives.
The man of business is the God of War,
And gold pulls all the strings and all the triggers.

KING
No hope in Arbitration and The Hague?

FRITHIOF
Good soothing powders in war-fever. Better
Cut out the festering hates that feed the fever.
The world must rest on love, not force and greed.
Brog's way is mad.

CHANCELLOR
Yours madder.

FRITHIOF
Yours most mad.
Brog, you and I—we three—contest the world.
Let the King mark which shall the strongest prove,
Brog lawless, you with law, or I with love.

[*Bows and offers his hand to the* KING, *who takes it in astonishment. Then, pointing towards the death-bells, exit, escorted by* OSRIC, *and cheered without.*]

CHANCELLOR
This man must die!

KING
Must die? Who saved the State!

CHANCELLOR
We cannot run the State by miracles.
My Osric had sufficed to quell the riot.
Brog's followers are few, but Frithiof's many.
He will demoralise both Church and Army,
And sap the pillars of your greatness.

POMBERG [*Triumphant*]
Ha!
What did I say!

CHANCELLOR
You said the *State* must kill him.
A fatal step! We should create a martyr,
A martyr would create a new religion,
A new religion would oppose the old,
And shake the State—and all for what? No, no!
I'd gladly choke the Count with these two hands—
He dared to turn his other cheek to me
With a superior, sanctimonious air—
But I must put the State before my pleasures.

KING
Then we must let him live?

CHANCELLOR
That does not follow.
He might be killed—by other hands than ours.

KING
By whose ?

CHANCELLOR
Ah, sire ! Leave Providence the work !
You saw it used the Count to baffle Brog,
And Brog, be sure, will have revenge ! Leave all
To Providence—with just a little push.
And mark how Providence is provident :
One single stroke will rid us of the zealot
And turn the vengeance of his followers
Against our other foes—the anarchists.
[*Turns smiling to* BLUM]
This is what Karl would call a combination !
[*Confused shouting. Re-enter* BARON KONRAD.]

KONRAD
Count Frithiof, sire, harangues the royal guards,
Telling them arms are sins against the spirit.
Should Pomberg not again arrest him ?

KING [*Looking helplessly at* CHANCELLOR]
Answer !

CHANCELLOR
Arrest the man who saved the State ? O Baron !
Just think ! Why, Brog would now be President !
Ah, sire ! While Frithiof lives your throne is safe.

KONRAD
While Frithiof lives ?

CHANCELLOR
Poor Konrad seems perturbed.
[*Shouting at him*]
Ay, long live Frithiof !

KONRAD [*Quaveringly*]
Long live Frithiof!
[*Re-enter* OSRIC, *with glowing face.*]

OSRIC
Ay,
God save Count Frithiof!

CHANCELLOR [*Turning savagely upon his son*]
Sir, you at least might show the grace of silence!
Get back at once to Graaf—and place yourself
Under arrest!

OSRIC
Arrest! For speaking?

CHANCELLOR
No!
For leaving Graaf unguarded and uncaptained!

OSRIC
But Blum said——

CHANCELLOR
Blum might be in league with Brog.
How could you know? There *have* been anarchists
With friends at Court. Am I not right, dear Baron?

KONRAD [*Uneasily*]
One cannot be too careful.
[*Exit hurriedly through archway.*]

CHANCELLOR
But for Blum
You would have captured Brog!

BLUM [*Terrified, falls on his knees*]
O sire, I swear——

KING
Rise, fool!
[*Draws his sword.*]
I knight you for your tidings.

BLUM [*Rises as in a dream, murmurs involuntarily*]
God
Of Abraham!
[*Almost puts on his high hat, then snatches it off.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Murmurs furiously*]
Is no one safe? That sword
Is dangerous.

KING
But as for you, Sir Osric,
A soldier's duty is obedience!

OSRIC
Yes, sire, but to his chiefs! My father is
Civilian.

CHANCELLOR
You dare chop logic, sir!
'Twas the Duke's order!

POMBERG [*Amazed*]
Eh?

CHANCELLOR [*Eyeing* POMBERG *dominatingly*]
His Highness' order!

Himself selected the more arduous post
To guard the sacred person of the monarch.
Your Highness does remember that ?

POMBERG

Most plainly !

[*Bows to* CHANCELLOR, *who bows even lower.*]

[*To* OSRIC] You are arrested, sir ! Give me your sword.

[OSRIC *dazedly surrenders his sword.*]

Repair to Graaf for disobedience,
And cowardice !

[OSRIC *flushes indignantly at the last word and starts forward towards* POMBERG, *then controls himself and looks at his father as for redress, but meeting only the same stern, unchanging gaze, salutes and exit slowly in dazed wrath. As the oaken door bangs behind him the* CHANCELLOR *turns on* POMBERG *like a tiger.*]

CHANCELLOR

How dare you call
My boy a coward !

[*His sword, leaping out like lightning, clashes against* OSRIC'S *sword in* POMBERG'S *hand, which has leapt up in instinctive defence.*]

KING [*Holding up his hand*]

Count !

CHANCELLOR

Your pardon, sire !

[*He stands with bowed head. The curtain falls quickly.*]

Act III

A grassy plateau in the mountains. Tents showing the camp of the Revolutionaries, who lie or stand around, carousing, singing, fiddling, playing cards. One digs at the back. Around rise snow-clad peaks. A full moon floods the landscape with light and peace, and overhead the sky palpitates with countless stars, obscured only at one edge by a creeping cloud. On the outermost rim of the plateau (which is seen to end almost in a precipice) a sentry paces unbrokenly throughout the Act. Upon a grassy knoll sits BROG, *a man of the people, with a powerful head; near by* BARON KONRAD *and the* LADY NORNA.

BROG [*Going to the digger at the back, says quietly*]
Well, have you dug his grave ?

DIGGER

'Tis dug.

BROG [*Resuming seat*]

Then silence !

Bring in the prisoner.

[*A drum rattles. From a tent* COUNT FRITHIOF *is seen emerging, surrounded by picturesque figures armed with rifles*]

Why, who unbound him ?

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST
Why, Captain, cords are wasted on this crank !

[*Gives* FRITHIOF *a violent push forward with the butt-end of his rifle.* FRITHIOF *staggers forward*

and comes to a standstill without the voluntary movement of a muscle.]
You see! Tied hand and foot!

FRITHIOF [*To* BROG, *&c.*]
God save you, friends!

BROG
We need no saving! That's for you!

FRITHIOF
Not so.
Saved once for all was I, and ever since
I float serenely in a sea of light
Which Death itself can never change to darkness.

BROG [*Sniggering*]
That must be comforting! [*Turns to* KONRAD]
D'ye hear that, comrade?

KONRAD [*Frightened, thinking his name has been mentioned*]
No names!

BROG
I called you "comrade."

KONRAD
Ah, of course!
All men are equal—that's philosophy.

BROG [*Putting his arm round* BARON KONRAD, *who shudders at his touch*]
Our comrade here is just a trifle squeamish
About our sending you to Kingdom Come;
He'll be relieved to hear you like the country.

KONRAD
I only said the Count must have fair trial.

FRITHIOF
" Judge not lest ye be judged "—I spurn your trial.

KONRAD
Nay, arguments and pleas demand their due.
Like you, Sir Count, I am philosopher ;
'Twixt you and me the law of reason rules.
My wish is you should own your sentence just.
Friend Brog was premature to mention Death.

BROG
It was the Count that mentioned Death, not I.

FRITHIOF
I mentioned Death but as a form of life.
You cannot kill me !

BROG
Oh, good Lord ! Excuse me !
That's really killing ! Ha, ha, ha ! How's that ?
[*Gives him a blow on the mouth. The crowd jeers.*]

NORNA [*Starting forward*]
How dare you, Brog ? This man is on his trial.

BROG
I thought he was a Christian scientist—
A chap without the feelings of a Christian.
There seems to be some very Christian blood.
[*Laughter.*]

NORNA
Pray let me wipe your mouth !
[*Takes out her handkerchief and wipes the blood.*]

FRITHIOF
O gentle lady,
By some gross aberration here, whose words
And touch fall softer than this moonlight——

BROG
Silence !

KONRAD
If Life and Death are one, why, all the better.
The court is opened. Brog, you have the word.

BROG
But you the words ! The gift of gab is yours.
What's there to say ? This Governmental tool
Has squashed our country's finest chance of freedom.
[*Truculent shouts.*]

KONRAD
A masterly indictment ! You, Count Frithiof,
Professing, like ourselves, the love of peace,
Have yet propped up a Government of blood
For war with Alba !

FRITHIOF
It is false !

NORNA
How false ?
Your Christian crutch *does* prop the Government,
Which grinds our poor with taxes for new warships
Which in their turn will scatter death and doom.

FRITHIOF
O gentle lady, consequences rest
With God alone—ours but to do the right,
To go on Christian crutches, as you say,
Seeing we lack the strength to go unaided.
What comes is God's concern—our human foresight
Purblindly would forecast effects. To-day
I *may* appear a prop to Government,
To-morrow this same teaching may uproot it.
Resist not evil, but reform yourself.

NORNA
Such teaching is miasma to the will,
And fosters poison-plants to ranker growth.
If *we* resist not evil, evil triumphs.

FRITHIOF
Not over God.

NORNA
There is no God except
The God in us who yearns to right the wrong.
And war will never cease from off the earth
Unless we end the Torgrims and the Holks.

FRITHIOF
No, no! In righting wrong you wrong the right
And wound the universal soul of good.

NORNA
The universal soul of good, forsooth!
Could universal good make such a world?

FRITHIOF
Have you experience then in making worlds ?
[*Looks up*]
I would not trust you with the smallest star
That safely nestles in the lap of space,
But though *He* slay me, yet I trust in Him !

NORNA
O gentle saint, in monstrous aberration—
You see I but return your compliment—
Whether or not there be this soul of good,
Assuredly there is that soul of evil
Our ancestors compactly christened Devil.
And you by bidding us to bear with evil
Are of the Devil's servants, worth a host
Of all his common rogues, who being rogues
May some day be exposed, while you, dear saint,
Invincibly immaculate, bid fair
To undermine the People's revolution
[*Menacing cries*]
Unless we silence you.

FRITHIOF
And then ?

KONRAD
Why then——

FRITHIOF
My voice will cry the louder.

BROG
Oh, indeed !
The pig being dead yet squeaketh ! We shall see.
[*Loud laughter.*]

KONRAD
Judge Brog, solemnity beseems a trial.

FRITHIOF
Nay, friend, all human trials are farcical.
What do we know of one another's souls ?

NORNA
We know your soul too well ; it is transparent.
We see it twisted out of shape. In lieu
Of fighting on our side, you spike our guns.
We kindle righteous wrath against the war-fiend,
You throw upon the flames your holy water.
By book and speech and now at last by action
You sap man's will and leave a jelly-fish
Afloat upon the so-called will of God,
Which is an ocean circumfusing life,
A welter purposeless, unsoundable !
Man's will is mightier than this mindless ocean—
We must be fire and steel to cut the waves,
Regardless of their roaring push against us,
To crash across tumultuary chaos
And frolic in the thunder-bursts of spray,
Finding in fighting Evil—happiness.

FRITHIOF
Only with God and Peace is happiness.

NORNA
You serve not God and Peace, but War and Devil.
The Prince of Darkness has no subtler henchman.
Your service must give Satan satisfaction.

KONRAD [*Grimly*]
It certainly gives Torgrim satisfaction.

FRITHIOF
The contrary. He told me I blaspheme
Against my rank, sex, country, King and God!

KONRAD
That's but his craft. Why else did he release you?
Your teaching is an army at his back,
And while you live the Throne and Church are safe.

FRITHIOF
You are deceived concerning Torgrim's views.

KONRAD [*Angrily*]
Indeed! I heard him tell his Majesty——

FRITHIOF
So you're at Court!
[*Sensation in crowd.*]

KONRAD [*Flushing, confused, frightened*]
Who said . . .? . . . This man must die!

FRITHIOF
Wise judge, I do admit my sentence just.

KONRAD
How do you mean?

FRITHIOF
You hoped I would—I do!

NORNA
Count, you must die—not as you mocking hint,

Because we fear your testimony. No!
For I, the Lady Norna——
[*A greater sensation in crowd*]

FRITHIOF

Ah, I felt
When first your nursing fingers touched my face
That angel-presence of the camps of Hunland.

NORNA

You were in Hunland?

FRITHIOF

Through the war. 'Twas there,
Beneath such stars as these, with death as near,
I learnt to know how we bemock God's will
At every turn, in Peace no less than War,
Seeing we build the pomp of Peace on Death,
On starved and frozen workers, as the ancients
Laid in their basements human sacrifices.
You talk of killing off the Holks and Torgrims,
Blind instruments of blinder social systems!
But first kill off your Christless Church and State,
Your standing hosts of soldiers, landlords, lawyers—
And, worst of all, the evil in yourself.
Reformers must begin with self-reform—
'Tis not so pleasant as reforming others.
So thinking, and to God's will all-surrendered—
Perceiving in *myself* the primal fault—
I threw away all books, save only one,
[*Draws out and returns to his breast a small, thick, leather-bound Bible with silver clasps*]
Became a peasant, turned my sword to ploughshare.

NORNA
And I, beneath such stars, by death surrounded,
Made oath to turn all ploughshares into swords,
To strike at all who with the peasants' taxes
Turn ploughshares' products back again to swords.

FRITHIOF
Ah, see the vicious circle—sword and sword
In ceaseless bloody swirl! How true the text!
Who takes the sword shall perish with the sword.
This, lady, is your loathsome fallacy,
To combat sin—but by another sin!
You are the evil which you fight against,
You answer hate with hate, not hate with love.

BROG
You'll answer one another until cockcrow.
I thank the fates *I*'m no philosopher,
Else Holk were still alive—and kicking us!

KONRAD
Brave Brog, your words are truly philosophic.

BROG [*With a facetious wry face*]
O Lord! Well, let us get to business. Comrades!
You've heard the speeches *pro* and *con* (too many).

KONRAD
And bear in mind a jury must be impartial.

BROG
And don't forget our pals now lying speechless,
Shot down by soldiers through this fool's intrusion.

[*Shouts of rage. One pushes* FRITHIOF *forward with the butt-end of his gun.*]
But don't let *me* affect your judgment.

REVOLUTIONISTS
No! [*Some laugh.*]

BROG
Have you considered well your verdict?

REVOLUTIONISTS
Ay!

BROG
What is the sentence?

REVOLUTIONISTS
Death!

BROG [*Turning to* KONRAD]
Do you agree?

KONRAD
I answered with my comrades.

BROG
Good!
[*To* NORNA] And you?

NORNA
Death! Death! To save from death ten thousand others.
These prattling prophets ever drenched the world
With blood; the nobler they the more the blood.
Was it not said of old, "I bring not peace,
I bring a sword"? Sir Saint, you are a peril,
More deadly than the snow upon yon peak,

Whose stainless purity does not debar
Its rolling down as avalanche to crush
The humble villages below. And thus
To save calamities we stay you here,
For ever white and harmless on your height.
Death, therefore, death!

FRITHIOF

O sweet and ill-starred lady,
I pity you—you know not what you do.

BROG

Hush! Prisoner, you are condemned to death.

FRITHIOF

My brother—so are you and every man.
Farewell, then, brother shadows—till we meet.

BROG

Stop sermonising, sir! Our lady friend,
Like Cinderella, must be home by midnight.
You were a soldier once: so you shall die
With military honours—lead instead
Of rope.

REVOLUTIONISTS

Ay, ay!
[*Rattle of rifles.*]

FRITHIOF

Ah, comrades, so you think

That lead or rope can make an end of me
On such a night of stars . . . ?
[*Moves, looking up.*]

BROG
Take care !

FRITHIOF
Of what ?

BROG
Star-gazers seldom see what's at their feet.

FRITHIOF
What is that pit ?

BROG
It is your grave.

FRITHIOF
I thank you
For such a courtesy when this abyss——

BROG
What ! Have your body found and then our footpath?
We're no such fools !

FRITHIOF
I thank you all the same
For giving me a mountain-top to cry from !

KONRAD
Except the eagle, there is none to hear,
Or lonely chamois.

FRITHIOF

You yourselves shall hear me,
And airships by this highway bear my message.

BROG [*Laughs*]
He *has* you there. But he in turn forgets
We'll stuff his mouth with clods of earth.

FRITHIOF [*Stooping and picking up a clod from his grave*]

With earth ?
Earth is the element through which upsprings
What lies in every seed. The tender grass,
The tiniest blade, has strength to push through stones,
And *I* should be too frail to reach the light !

BROG
Oho ! You think of rising up again !
I'll throw an extra shovelful myself.

FRITHIOF [*Picking up spade from the grave*]
With *this ?* You think this tool can cover *me ?*
Me linked to all the stars, and one with God ?
Why, roll these mountains on me, and I rise !
My spirit spreading through all Time to come,
Shall leaven nations, races, breeds unborn,
Till at the grave of War all peoples stand
And plant the rose of universal Love.

NORNA
That day will come—through us—you but delay it.

BROG [*Impatiently*]
The day will come through both of you. Come, bustle!
Or else that cloud will cover up the moon.
The firing squad!
[*Some Revolutionists on the left step forward*]
Good! Under weigh at last!
Bandage his eyes.

FRITHIOF
No, no, it is your friend
Who needs a bandage, poor philosopher.
[*Pointing to* BARON KONRAD, *who, unable to witness death, has turned his back on the scene.*]

BROG
That's true! [*Laughs*] Philosophy! . . . Well, stand from him
And let him flop upon his marrow-bones
And make—how runs their cant?—his peace with God.
Three times our sentry shall pace to and fro,
And then—the volley!

REVOLUTIONISTS
Ay!
[*Rattle of rifles.*]

FRITHIOF
At one with God
In every hour, I have no peace to make.

One pacing of the sentry will suffice; one look
Of love and trust at all God's throbbing worlds!
[*Walks away from all and looks up at the stars*]
Worlds without end—eternal Time—and Love
In all, through all. Amen.

VOICES [*On his left*] Amen.

ONE SOLITARY VOICE [*On his right*] Amen.

BROG [*Angrily*]
The firing squad—by the right, quick march, halt, front!
[*To* FRITHIOF]
Where are you going?

FRITHIOF
To my grave.
[*He faces it. To the firers*]
Now shoot!
My forward fall will save your arms my burden.
Good-night, dear friends. God bless you with more light.

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST [*Throws down gun*]
I cannot shoot!

BROG
To hell! White-livered skunk!

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST
This is no man!

BROG [*Producing his revolver*]

God damn you! Take your gun!

[*The fellow sullenly and with trembling hand picks up the gun*]

Take steady aim, and when I give the word——

[*Turns fretfully on* KONRAD, *who has covered his face*]

You shake their nerves, behaving like a woman—
I beg the lady's pardon—*she's* a man.

KONRAD

She is familiar with the battlefield.

BROG

Oho! we baptize you in blood to-day!
All ready, men? Present arms! Fire!

[*The volley rings out sharply. For an instant all is obscured by smoke, then as it clears away* FRITHIOF *is seen standing with the same serene look of love.*]

OMNES

Not dead!

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST

I said this was no man!

BROG [*Raging*]

You bat-eyed brutes,
To miss that size of target at ten paces!
Reload at once!

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST

Not I! [*Throws down gun.*]

SECOND REVOLUTIONIST

Nor I! [*Throws down gun.*]

THIRD REVOLUTIONIST

Nor I! [*Throws down gun.*]
He said we could not kill him.

BROG

Death and thunder!
And so you swallowed that, you sons of witches!
Such shivery-shaky shots would miss yon mountain!
Reload, I tell you!

ALL THE FIRING SQUAD

No!

BROG

To hell! I'll show you
If he is powder-proof, you——

[*Fires almost point-blank at* FRITHIOF'S *heart.* FRITHIOF *stands serenely as before*]

Christ!

[*After a moment of awe* BROG *pulls himself furiously together*]

To hell!
Some traitor-swine has drawn my ball. . . . Great God!
There's still five bullets in the cursèd thing.

[*His finger trembles as he cocks the pistol*]

You've set my nerves on edge, you filthy——

[*The pistol slips from his grasp, he totters back on the mound, wiping his brow and muttering hoarsely*]

Blast it!
That pistol picked off Holk at fifty yards.

KONRAD [*Strung up and frightened lest* FRITHIOF *escape*]
So these are they would baptize me in blood!
This comes of having no philosophy.
Clearly each lout, priest-ridden, superstitious,
Fired wide, relying on his neighbours' bullets.
[*The firing squad looks guilty*]
And you—you fired point-blank into his Bible!
[BROG *stares at* FRITHIOF]
Give me that dagger—daggers cannot miss!
I've never killed, but kill I must to-night,
If but to vindicate Philosophy.
[*He lifts the dagger which he has snatched from* BROG'S *belt.* FRITHIOF *looks serenely at him, eye to eye. The dagger drops to the ground with a little thud.* NORNA *springs forward and snatches up* BROG'S *pistol.*]

NORNA
And these are *men!*

KONRAD [*In an instantaneous ecstasy of belief*]
No, no, we cannot kill him!

NORNA
I can and must, alas! since Fate has doomed me
To execute the judgment.
[*She fires.* FRITHIOF *staggers, mortally wounded.*]

KONRAD [*Sobbingly supporting the body*]
Master!

FRITHIOF

Peace!

Only my body dies: my spirit is with you
Always . . .

[*He dies. The curtain falls. It rises again and shows* NORNA *standing rigid. The cloud has crept over the moon, and in the sombre starlight* BROG *and his men are seen shovelling earth into the grave, towards which* KONRAD *and a few others gaze in reverence. For the rest, the carousing, singing, fiddling, and card-playing as before. Life goes on. A little later all is silence and the lonely grave lies unmarked in the moonlight. The white peaks loom ghostly. The sentry paces.*]

Act IV

The castle terrace as before on an afternoon of the following September. The Court is rehearsing a ballet composed by the KING *in honour of the birth of a Prince. The* KING *is discovered, wielding the conductor's baton, the centre of a glittering throng.*

KING
No, no, the sea-nymphs whirl the other way!
You spoil my plot—to wit, that ocean too
Partakes the joy at birth of Gothia's prince
To rule our fleet. . . . You, mermaid number three,
Must dance with both feet joined to feign a tail.
[*Dances.*]
So, so, flop-flop! It needs imagination!
[*The* DUKE OF POMBERG *is ushered in through the oaken door, but the* KING *takes no notice of him till the dance is finished.*]
Divinely danced, dear Lady Ingeborg!
Well, Duke! What brings you from the city?

POMBERG
The dearth of wisdom, sire! I've come to seek
Your royal counsel.

KING [*With gesture of dismissal*]
'Tis at your command.
To-morrow, ladies, when I hope the stage
Will be quite ready . . .
[*Exeunt dancers, courtiers and musicians. The* KING *lights a cigarette.*]
Now, dear Pomberg, speak.

POMBERG
Your Majesty remembers how Count Torgrim
Arranged for Frithiof's death.

KING
Nay, scarce arranged :
Foresaw, perhaps.

POMBERG
I loathe these cryptic methods.
Some day—who knows ?—they will be turned on us.

KING
Count Torgrim's loyalty is not in question.

POMBERG
Most true ! But with his years his blunders grow.
To-day's the birthday of the vanished Frithiof,
And how to quiet his disciples beats me.
To-night these Frithians—nicknamed so for short—
With torch and hymn parading, clad in smockfrocks,
Will trample, singing, on my stern decree
Against processions !

KING
Why not let them walk ?

POMBERG
Who knows the walk would not become a run,
The run a riot ? All the streets are fevered
With bawlers of his picture and the badge.

KING
What badge ?

POMBERG
Why, this ! A dove with olive branch.

KING
A pretty curio ! [*Pockets it.*]

POMBERG
Too many flaunt it.

KING
Leave them at peace, since I am friend of peace.

POMBERG
All problems melt within your plumbless wisdom.
May I, before I go, most humbly tender
Congratulations on the Prince ?

KING [*Radiant*]
You've seen him !

POMBERG
And felt him ! Gad ! Put out his little fists
And smote me in the face—a warrior !
You would not need to look for Holk's successor
Were he but grown.

KING
I look no longer, Duke !
Since you and I reviewed Holk's chief campaigns,
I have arrived at *your* conclusion——

POMBERG [*Astonished and happy*]
Sire!

KING
He had no talents not possessed by—others.
[*Smiles.*]

POMBERG [*Obviously thinking the* KING *means him*]
Your Majesty's agreement overwhelms me!

KING
I've sent for Torgrim. He shall learn that I
Can choose, myself.

POMBERG
He *will* be angry.

KING
What!
Shall not his King by right divine, to whom
The nation newly owes a Prince . . .
[*Clapping his hands.*]
Brava!
The Queen has left her rooms.

POMBERG
And but six weeks!
What royal courage!
[*To himself, turning away joyously*]
Ah, at last I can
Reform the army—change those uniforms.
[*Four lackeys appear, carrying the* QUEEN *in a long cushioned chair;* AZRA, *a maid of honour, attends her and arranges cushions.*]

KING
Brava! Most welcome! Are you comfortable?
Or is there anything you wish?

QUEEN
The baby!

KING
Go, bring the Prince!

QUEEN
No, no, they'll drop him! Azra!
[*Exeunt attendants.*]
How beautiful to see again this river—
I hope he'll have his best Valenciennes!

POMBERG
Madam, he shall—whatever that may be!
[*Exit hastily into the castle.*]

KING
O Elsa, I am happy! Peace at home—
And Peace abroad—a son and heir—and you!

QUEEN [*Repulsing him coldly*]
Four things—but all good things, they say, are three.
Pray leave me out! My *rôle* is now fulfilled!

KING
I do not understand you.

QUEEN

The Alliance
'Twixt Gothia and Hunland is achieved.
Your dynasty, moreover, is assured.
Count Torgrim's combination is complete.

KING

You speak as you and I were puppets!

QUEEN

Worse!
Puppets lack hearts or nerves to agonise—
Your Chanc'llor carves his will in quiv'ring flesh!
You must dismiss him.

KING

What!

QUEEN

Ah, see, you fear him!

KING

By God, you libel me! This very hour
I mean to drive my royal will o'er his
In choice of Holk's successor.

QUEEN

And you choose?

KING

Myself.

QUEEN

Yourself? What do you know of war?

KING
I'll *have* no war!
[*The* QUEEN *bursts into a fit of gay laughter.*]
Nay, but you twist my meaning!
Listen! 'Tis Pomberg's counsel—he's an expert.

QUEEN [*Laughing on*]
You'll have no war! But what is Torgrim weaving?

KING
Torgrim is but the agent of my will,
And I will set my foot upon his warships.

QUEEN [*Laughs on*]
As Admiral as well as General?

KING
You call me puppet, yet when I grow iron——
[*Enter* POMBERG.]

POMBERG
What happiness reigns here! His Royal Highness
Laughs also in his best Valenciennes!
But I was nearer tears to think of all
The people's love of which our laureate sings—
The loyal love that like a springtide flood,
Crashing and foaming, streams towards his cradle
To float it high as—[*breaks down;* KING *prompts him*]—Ararat—not only
From Gothia or Hunland's dimmest hamlet,
But from strange Afric sands or far—[*breaks down; again* KING *prompts him*]—Brazil,

Wherever beats a Gothian heart responsive
To all that long divinity of blood.

KING
Ah, here he comes!

[*Enter* AZRA *with the baby Prince, whose linen is stamped with a royal crown.* POMBERG, *snatching the baby to his cuirass, obsequiously hands him to the* QUEEN.]

QUEEN
And how's my ickle sweeting?

POMBERG
With what majestic dignity he lies!
Imperial calm is stamped upon his brow.

PRINCE
La-la! Boo-hoo! La-la! Boo-hoo! Boo-he!

POMBERG
What did I say? He makes his presence felt
Already, though so young.

KING
Hush, little man!

[*Tries to soothe him by showing him the Frithian badge.*]

PRINCE [*More loudly*]
La-la! La-la! Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo! Boo-he!

QUEEN
You make him worse! There! There! His mother's pet!

KING
Which of us, Pomberg, do you think he favours?

QUEEN
He is too naughty. [*To* AZRA] Take him back.

KING
Let *me*
I never seem to hold him.

QUEEN
Can I trust you?

[POMBERG *again obsequiously transfers the baby to the* KING. *Exeunt all save* QUEEN *and* POMBERG. *The* PRINCE *continues to howl as he is borne out.*]

POMBERG
What music in that cry—how silver-bell-like!

QUEEN
If but the bell would ring a little less!

POMBERG
Imperial infants always scream like that!

QUEEN
Touching the question, Duke, of Holk's successor,
His Majesty has surely no experience.

POMBERG
Precisely why he turns to *me*.

QUEEN
But you
Should not have so advised him.

POMBERG
Then should I
Have let Count Torgrim push his Osric up ?

QUEEN
He dare not—over Osric's seniors.

POMBERG
He dared to send his brat to quench Brog's rising !
But luckily my measures stamped it out
Before the cub had even reached the scene.
Is this the man to follow mighty Holk ?
Nay, surely I myself——

QUEEN [*Perceives* KING *returning*]
We'll talk anon.
[*Re-enter* KING, *flicking at his breast with a handkerchief.*]

KING
Torgrim has come—I bade them send him here
To pay you homage and congratulation.

QUEEN [*Starting up*]
I will not meet the boor!
[POMBERG *rushes towards interior to beckon the lackeys.*]

KING
Then I must come
And tell you how I've met and mastered him,
[*She smiles. Enter the four lackeys.*]
And cut down ships and taxes! Puppet, forsooth!
[*The* QUEEN *breaks again into her mocking laughter, which continues as she is carried out, and which* POMBERG *reflects in a parasitic grin.*]
What twists your face?

POMBERG [*Terrified, making off*]
Neuralgia, sire!

KING
Remain!

POMBERG
My presence, sire, would give Count Torgrim umbrage,
As though I were a part of Majesty
Whose very shadow is too bright for me.

KING
You *must* explain your choice of Holk's successor.

POMBERG
Sire, modesty forbids.

KING

But I command !

[CHANCELLOR *heard without on the right, sneezing.*]

How hot it is !

POMBERG

There's thunder in the air !

[*Enter the* CHANCELLOR, *walking firmly.*]

KING

Ah, Count !

[*The* CHANCELLOR *bows low in reply.*]

POMBERG

How well your Excellence is looking !

CHANCELLOR [*Sniffing as if at an unbearable scent*]

Good morrow, Duke . . .

[*Long embarrassing pause. The three men twiddle thumbs and hum tunes.*]

Your gracious Majesty

Has sent for me.

KING

Yes . . . What a pretty view !

[*All turn and look at the view.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Grimly*]

Unless the sky is red !

POMBERG [*Hastily*]
Why, sunset's *best !*
[*Another embarrassing pause. More humming and twiddling.*]

CHANCELLOR
Your Majesty desires . . . ?

KING [*With an inspiration*]
'Tis Pomberg who desires.

CHANCELLOR [*Fixing* POMBERG *with fierce eye*]
Ah, *so !*
[POMBERG *is reduced to nervous silence.*]

KING
Why surely, Pomberg, you recall the theme
We were discussing——

POMBERG [*With a rival inspiration*]
Ah, to-night's procession.

KING
Eh ? What ?

POMBERG [*Quickly to* CHANCELLOR]
You said that Frithiof's death would serve
To smash the anarchists.

CHANCELLOR
My son will smash them.

POMBERG
But Frithiof's disappearance, soul and body,
Has made a legend of his flight to heaven.

CHANCELLOR
At least the Government's not given hell.

POMBERG
A nice decapitation of the hydra !
There sprout upon his stump a thousand heads !

CHANCELLOR
Until the time arrives to brand the stump
With red-hot irons, then by God ! I will.

KING
But why destroy these friends of peace ?

CHANCELLOR
Because,
No less demoralising than their Master,
They sap the Army and the Church—if he
Was marked out for destruction, why not they ?
His followers must surely follow him !
[*Chuckles grimly at his jest.*]

KING
But I myself am friend of arbitration,
Which, bringing States like man and man to justice,
Forms the next stage in human evolution.
Frithiof was right—why cannot we with Alba
Limit our armaments ?

CHANCELLOR

May your humble servant
In reverence suggest, your innocence
By Alba's crafty, canting diplomats
Has been abused. Why, here has Europe played
All night at cards, and now that Alba holds
The balance of the winnings she's to cry,
" Let's play no more—'tis wicked—let us pray ! "
Let your converted gambler first disgorge
Her spoils before she shuts up Monte Carlo.

KING

We've won enough—my reign shall be of Peace.

CHANCELLOR

And just because beneath your peaceful sway
Our commerce grows, we need more ships of war.
These Frithians but invite the war you ban.
" Resist not evil " means " resist not Alba."

KING

No doubt we must protect our gro ving commerce.

CHANCELLOR

Your Majesty's imperial wisdom hits it !
I had not thought of putting it so patly.
And therefore—since at any moment Alba
May choose to strike and paralyse our commerce—
I beg we now appoint dear Holk's successor.

KING [*Shrinkingly*]

Oh, is it so imperative ?

CHANCELLOR

Most urgent.

KING [*Looking desperately at* POMBERG, *who coughs*]
Pomberg, I think, has some suggestion.

POMBERG

Sire!
Should we not first request the Chancellor's?

KING
His counsel—first or last—is worth our hearing.
I pray you, Count.

CHANCELLOR

Much meditation, sire,
Confirms my view that for heroic ventures
Not old but young blood answers best the trumpet!

KING
O excellent! The young are best! Eh, Pomberg?

POMBERG [*In puzzled surprise*]
Assuredly . . . except of course in war.

KING
In war! What mean you? Most of all in war!
Why wait to dim the eagle eye, replace
Napoleonic grip by toothless bulldog?

CHANCELLOR
Your Majesty's apt phrasing beggars mine.

POMBERG
Bull-puppies, too, are blind and toothless.

KING [*Enraged and amazed*]
Duke!

POMBERG
I only mean, sire, one may be *too* young.

CHANCELLOR
Why scarcely, Duke. I lack his Majesty's
Poetic gift. I can but say in prose
That Alexander died at thirty-two
With no more worlds to conquer.

KING
What's the reason?
[*They listen as to an oracle.*]
Not old but young blood answers best the trumpet.

CHANCELLOR
How true! The last word, sire, of wisdom.

KING [*Beaming*]
And so
To follow Holk I choose—myself.

POMBERG AND CHANCELLOR
Yourself!

POMBERG [*Ghastly*]
I am rejoiced.

KING [*To* CHANCELLOR]
You too, I hope ?

CHANCELLOR [*With a low sardonic bow*]
Profoundly !
Who more recalls the war-horse clothed in thunder ?
Provided Osric do the dray-horse work,
The humdrum dragging of the daily burden.
Osric must organise the force you lead.

KING [*Pleasantly*]
Why not ?

POMBERG [*Outraged*]
That needs an old and trained——

CHANCELLOR [*To* KING]
Ah, yes !
Some red-tape man to flaunt his crude experience
Against your flash of intuition.

KING
Ha !

CHANCELLOR [*Bowing*]
I thank——

POMBERG
But this is nepotism !

CHANCELLOR
What !
Did I not let you mure him in a fortress ?

POMBERG
The which he quits to-day. How can he step
From prison to such pride of place ?

KING
Ah, true !

[POMBERG *beams.*]

CHANCELLOR
We shall observe the due gradations. First
He wipes out Brog, who holds the hills against you.
Thus grows a general, and so by——

KING [*Impatient*]
Splendid !
The Queen expects me. She will be relieved
To find your view agrees with mine.

CHANCELLOR
O sire, what wisdom marks your every choice !

[*Exit* KING *hastily into the castle,* POMBERG *vainly trying to secure his attention and talking simultaneously with the* CHANCELLOR, *who then turns his back on* POMBERG, *and moves towards the archway.*]

POMBERG [*Half drawing his sword*]
I'll challenge him, by God ! I'll challenge——

[*The* CHANCELLOR *turns his head a moment.*]

No !
His blood's too low-born, it would stain my sword.

[*Exit into the castle, humming with careful carelessness.*]

CHANCELLOR
Lord God of Battles! Thou hast made
My son the sword of Gothia's greater glory,
Which is to greater glory of Thy name.
Deliver Alba, Lord, into his hand,

[NORNA *appears from within the castle, and takes out a pocket pistol.*]

And let him grind Thine enemies to dust . . .
Now in his Lady Norna's youthful heart
Put out the last red ashes of revolt . . .
Domine sanctissime . . .

[*His head sinks, his lips murmur in silent prayer as he paces out.* NORNA *takes aim. Enter from the castle* BARON KONRAD.]

KONRAD [*In hoarse whisper*]
In God's name!

[*Catches at her pistol.*]

NORNA [*In low angry tones as she turns*]
You? Philosopher turned Frithian!

KONRAD
Philosopher means wisdom-lover. Why
May one not change his wisdom? Ah, my sister,
Would God you too would doff your pride of brain
And cry to Frithiof for forgiveness!

NORNA [*Scornfully*]
I?
Who saw him safely buried!

KONRAD

Is he buried ?
That face—those eyes—that look that loosed
The dagger from my grasp and burnt away
Philosophy for ever—these are buried ?
Buried like Brog or any common clay ?
If death could decompose that face divine,
Why does its sweetness hover o'er the world ?
Why streams a light from that lone mountain grave ?

NORNA

His grave ? What profits all your dead religion ?
Processions, ay, and hymns of love—but Peace ?
This pious canter mocks your dreams—this snake,
With double tongue, coiled for the spring at Alba.
His death alone will stave off war. Behold !
[*Produces a manuscript book.*]

KONRAD

What's that ?

NORNA

Blum's diary—black with proof
Against his chief. I stole it from his desk,
Crammed with so many like it, he'll not miss it.
[*Grimly*] I have, you see, the entry to the monster
Yet wished full proof of his perpended murders.
[*As* BARON KONRAD *and* NORNA *are going into the castle the* CHANCELLOR *paces prayerfully back across the scene and meets them.*]

CHANCELLOR [*To* KONRAD, *sardonically*]
So you've turned Frithian! What was on your conscience?

KONRAD [*Uneasily*]
What do you mean?

CHANCELLOR
A joke! Resist not humour!
[*Chuckles.*]
[*Exeunt* BARON *and* NORNA. *Enter* OSRIC *from the other direction. He starts to see his father—hesitates as in fear of him.*]

CHANCELLOR
My Osric!

OSRIC
Father!
[*They embrace.*]

CHANCELLOR
So you recognise
That disobedience is fitly punished.
[*Pinches his cheek.*]

OSRIC
Most gratefully, for in my leisured pacings
I saw obedience is the primal virtue.
'Tis that which God before all else demands.

CHANCELLOR
Brave Osric! *Now* you are become a man,
And worthy of the work God gives to you,
Which is to carve your name and Gothia's
Upon the world with such a sacred sword
As never Caesar nor Napoleon wielded.
This hour consoles me for that dreadful day
When I lost Holk, and you the chance I gave you
To follow him——

OSRIC [*Dazed*]
The chance to follow Holk!

CHANCELLOR
But you shall yet avenge him and succeed him!
And compensate us for the sad postponement
His sickness, then his murder, brought our plans.

OSRIC
Succeed him? I?

CHANCELLOR [*Patting his shoulder lovingly*]
I like you to be dazed.
Yet who but you could be to me like Holk?
My bosom is a narrow place: my plans
Fill it so full there is no room for strangers.

OSRIC
But, father dear, it is impossible.

CHANCELLOR [*Smiling*]
So Pomberg said, but not his Majesty.

OSRIC
But I have just been writing to headquarters,
Resigning my commission.

CHANCELLOR
Malediction!
You dared this step without consulting me!

OSRIC
You froze me, sir; I dared not break the silence.

CHANCELLOR
To hell! The letter's gone?

OSRIC
Not yet.

CHANCELLOR
Thank God!
That stinkard would have risen on your ruins.
Let's go and get the letter.

OSRIC
It is here!
[*His left hand takes it from a pocket.*]

CHANCELLOR
Then tear it in a thousand pieces.

OSRIC
No!
[*Their eyes meet. The* CHANCELLOR *masters himself.*]

CHANCELLOR
Your reason, pray ?

OSRIC
Did I not say I saw
That God demands from us obedience ?
This trade of bloodshed violates His law.

CHANCELLOR [*Furious*]
Frithiof again !

OSRIC
Sir, in the fortress I
Re-read his books and thought of my backslidings,
And when they gave me back my sword it scorched.
Then, coming out, I heard of his ascension.

CHANCELLOR
So you believe he went up like Elijah !

OSRIC
His coming is more marvel than his going.

CHANCELLOR
What fudge ! He fought himself with Holk in Hunland.

OSRIC
Those were his days of sin before he broke
His sword and donned the smock of brotherhood.

CHANCELLOR
Oh, blast your brotherhood! Some wax doll spawned
This puling generation fed on pap
And barley-sugar-sticks of sentiment!
What! Shall I call a lousy bumpkin brother,
And slobber o'er him in fraternal cuddlings?
That makes me lousy and himself no cleaner.

OSRIC
He is your brother all the same in soul.

CHANCELLOR
Neither in soul nor body. Dominance—
There rings the password of the universe.
Who knows it, he is free of every camp.
Equality, your level, endless cornfield,
However fat and fair and golden-stalked,
Would set us pining for the snow-topped peaks
And barren glaciers. Life is fight, thank God!
Come, bare your forehead to the fierce salt Truth.
Take war away and men would sink to molluscs,
Limpets that wait the tide to wash them food.
The nations would grow foul with lazy feeding.
What Heaven loves is breeds with life a-tingle,
Swift-gliding, flashing, darting death at rivals,
Men fearing God and with no other fear.
Thus were the Albans, now the turn is ours
To be the chosen people of Jehovah.

OSRIC
Our mission is the nobler work of Peace.

CHANCELLOR
And how fulfil it save we change this cockpit,
This continent into a greater Gothia ?
One faith, one rule, one tongue, one endless Peace !

OSRIC
I know, dear father, that your dream and mine
Are one, but love and not the sword shall bring it.

CHANCELLOR
And meantime Alba in her fierce ambition,
With fire and sword invading *us*, roots out
Our faith, rule, tongue, peace (not to mention
mission)
While we tend stomachs to be ripped like pigs
And throw our women to the soldiery !
A tender morsel, now, like Lady Norna——

OSRIC [*Putting his hand involuntarily to his sword*]
There's no such danger !

CHANCELLOR
Ask our spies.

OSRIC [*Struggling with himself*]
But meantime
I must be loyal to the Master.

CHANCELLOR
Loyal ?
And leave him unavenged ?

OSRIC

What mean you ?

CHANCELLOR

Fool ! Learn the truth the State has learnt. Your Prophet
Ascended—ay, but on the wings of murder !

OSRIC

Murder ? What fiend would dare——?
[*Draws sword.*]

CHANCELLOR

What fiend slew Holk ?
That sword-leap is the answer to your prattling.
Your single stroke shall deal a double vengeance.
Cut Brog and all his desperadoes down,
Ay, hew them down like the Amalekites,
Sparing no soul alive !
[*He goes round and takes the letter from* OSRIC'S *now passive left hand and tears it up. He moves away, then impulsively returns to clasp* OSRIC *to his breast*]
God bless you ! . . . Ha !
And here God's blessing comes—your Lady Norna.
[*Gestures significantly and exit humming a gay tune, which winds like a tragic coil round* OSRIC *and* NORNA, *who now re-enters, holding the diary, while* OSRIC *stands dazed with drawn sword.*]

NORNA

What means this sword ?

OSRIC

It leapt to slay a monster.

NORNA

What, here ?

OSRIC

I stand rebuked.

[*Sheathes sword.*]

I am distraught
By news that Brog had murdered Frithiof.

NORNA

Brog ?

OSRIC

Pray let it rest. How can I look at you
And think of blood ?

[*She moves off.*]

Nay, let me look at you,
For I would cleanse my thoughts from this black world
In your pure eyes.

NORNA

I have forbid your coming.

OSRIC

As well forbid the moth to seek the flame.

NORNA

Most aptly said ! What *am* I but a flame,

To scorch your life-sap, shrivel up your wings ?
O use them while there's time !

OSRIC

You are not flame,
But vitalising sunshine—all my soul
Is burgeoning in the radiance.

NORNA

So feels
The moth before his dash at death !

OSRIC

Come death !
I still shall feel the splendour round my heart
Close, close a moment ere the sting begins.

NORNA [*Overcome*]
O, Osric !

OSRIC
Norna ! [*Embraces her.*] This is life, not death.

NORNA [*Breaking away*]
'Tis neither ! 'Tis mirage and mockery.
Tempt me no more with dreams of happiness.
I was not born for pasture in the valley,
A trumpet calls me to the mountain-top,
And I must battle where a whirling snow
Blinds every track and gap. My only light
A great red sun that, monstrous through a mist,
Looms like a giant gout of blood : I walk

Alone, unguided, chartless, footsore, frozen.
Then comes a mocking mountain-fiend——

OSRIC

That's I ?

NORNA

Yes, you! A mountain fiend who cries :
Rest, weary wanderer, your journey's over.
This glacier is a cosy, glowing hearth,
This precipice a couch from which to peer
Into the ruddy fire and see sweet pictures,
This mound of snow a stool to prop your feet.
Oh go! Do you not see you make still bleaker
The mountain waste, the snow, the sun of blood,
And that lone path which I must tread alone ?

OSRIC

I only see that you are sad and strange.
Dear, let us leave the world that makes you so,
And, far from Courts and camps, turn simple peasants,
Following the Master.

NORNA [*With a strange laugh*]

Frithiof ?

OSRIC

Where's the jest ?

NORNA

It is a jest that shakes not ribs but brain,
Even to madness.
[*Sinks upon the stone bench.*]

OSRIC [*Uneasily*]

Madness ?

NORNA [*Draws him to her side with a semi-involuntary gesture*]

Yet I smile
To think of you and me in peasant costume—
A smock-frock yours, a cap and kirtle mine !
You plough our bit of ground, I make the butter.
I fatten pigs and calves, you market them !
We dance together on the village green,
And kneel together in the village church.
When old, we sit a-sunning in the porch
Those droning summer Sunday afternoons,
A long clay pipe between your wrinkled lips,
A big black Bible on my ancient lap,
And tears of faith behind my spectacles.
Grandchildren clamber up our shrivelled knees,
Their faces shine with soap and innocence.
Thus drowsy-sweet the days slip by till we
Nid-nod into the deeper peace of God,
And hand in hand we fall asleep—in Frithiof !
[*Springs up hysterically.*]
Was ever feigned so comical a picture ?
Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

OSRIC

Your cheek is wet. Your laugh is false. Dear love,
At heart of hearts you like the picture.

NORNA

No !
Off, off, you weakling ! Would you make me weak ?
I hated Frithiof and his sapless teachings.

OSRIC
You hated Frithiof, hated holiness ?

NORNA
It is not holiness to suffer evil.
Resisting evil is the holiness :
War against war, war to the knife against
The lords of war ! When Brog shot Holk I gloried.

OSRIC
You glor—— Nay, see I know your paradoxes.
Dear, smile with me—or at me as of old.

NORNA [*Stamps foot*]
My paradoxes ! Holk may slay his thousands,
And be a nation's hero. But who saves
His tens of thousands by a single death
You style assassin !

OSRIC [*Puts his arms protectively round her*]
This is not yourself.

NORNA
It is that Alpine self you do not know ;
The self that slew your prating prophet Frithiof.

OSRIC
Ah, now I know you try me ! That was Brog.

NORNA
Brog failed in nerve. The glorious shot was mine.

OSRIC [*Releasing her, moving back rigidly*]
You . . . shot . . . the Master! No, she's mad,
thank God!
It is hallucination.

NORNA
For your sake
I almost melt to wish the deed undone.
But we lone seekers of the mountain-top
Must leave our hearts below. Now draw and slay me
Before I slay another of your idols.

OSRIC
O God!

[OSRIC *staggers back half-fainting.* NORNA *holds out her hands towards him, half in yearning, half to support him. Shuddering at her touch, he utters a terrible cry and throws her off.*]

OSRIC
Back, sacrilegious murderess!

[*Exit frenziedly. She swoons and the diary drops from her hand. The curtain falls.*]

Act V

The CHANCELLOR'S *study. Late the same afternoon. The room is as in Act I, save that the screen is now moved and the old settee visible, with his dressing-gown lying on it, and a fire burning in the grate.* BLUM *is busy deciphering a wire. From without, the* CHANCELLOR *is heard humming the same tune with which he left the castle, and presently, unfolding a muffler from his throat as if fresh from the street, he throws open the door and enters hilariously.*

CHANCELLOR
Sir Karl! Still stodging! Throw your quill away.
We have a toast to drink to Holk's successor.

BLUM [*Smiling*]
It can't be Pomberg, then.

CHANCELLOR [*Laughing*]
Ha! Ha! Poor Pomberg!
Ho! Martha!
[MARTHA *looks in.*]
Bring champagne!
[MARTHA *disappears.*]
We drink to Osric!

BLUM
Appointed?

CHANCELLOR
Ay, and Pomberg *dis*appointed.
[*Laughs heartily, and slaps* BLUM *on the back.*]

Come, whistle to your underlings to cease,
I will not work them overtime to-day.

BLUM [*Whistling and speaking down the tube*]
His Excellence gives holiday . . . [*Smiling*] They cheer.

[*Enter* MARTHA *with a bottle of champagne and two glasses on a tray.*]

CHANCELLOR
And here is cheery Martha . . . What is this ?
Two glasses only ? Where is mine ? Nice treatment !

MARTHA [*Bewildered*]
Am *I* to drink ?

CHANCELLOR
Unless you would insult me.
Our Osric is to head the army.

MARTHA [*Joyously*]
Osric !

CHANCELLOR
And what is still more brave—to head a household !
I hope his son will pull less hard than mine.

MARTHA [*Ecstatic*]
He's marrying ?

CHANCELLOR
God bless him !

MARTHA

And his bride.

But who's the lucky lady ?

CHANCELLOR [*Mysterious, taking a pinch of snuff*]

Ah, perhaps
Himself when he comes home will tell you that :
I left them at the settling-point. Sir Karl
Might make a guess.

BLUM

The Lady Norna ?

CHANCELLOR

Wizard !

MARTHA

That lovely lady who adores you so ?

CHANCELLOR

Not *me !*

MARTHA

Yes, you. The day the King came here
She spoke as if your rooms were holy ground,
E'en those the royal foot had left untrod.
I thought her rather silly.

CHANCELLOR [*Chuckling*]

Then be sure
'Twas Osric's step not mine made holy ground.
Go, get my glass.

[*Exit* MARTHA. *Standing at the table, he begins opening the wine.*]

BLUM

So that is settled, too!
But how about the lady's anarchism?

CHANCELLOR

Holk's death and Osric's love have cured her bravely.
E'en Konrad has deserted her for Frithiof.

BLUM

Then *all* the threads are woven to your pattern!

CHANCELLOR

Except the threads I spin in air—those lame
Aerial battleships.

BLUM

Nay, even those
Fly high at last—the wire is just deciphered!

CHANCELLOR [*Snatching eagerly at the papers*]

Ah! God be praised! Now all my life flies high!
[*Enter* MARTHA *with glass. He pulls out the cork.*]
And all is sparkle! [*Pours wine.*]
Now in these three glasses
A threefold toast we have the bliss to drink:
To Osric—Osric's bride—and death to Alba!
[*They touch glasses.* BLUM *puts his glass to his lips but sets it down untasted.*]

BLUM

I cannot drink to war to-day.

CHANCELLOR [*About to drink*]
Damnation!

BLUM
It would profane the Master's birthday.
[*Throws back his coat and shows the* FRITHIOF *badge over his heart.*]

CHANCELLOR
What!
[*The glass falls from his hand and smashes.*]
You too!

MARTHA
O dear, such costly drink!
[*Goes down on her knees to pick up fragments.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Fiercely*]
Let be!
I have to settle with this Frithian fool.
[*Exit* MARTHA, *with hastily gathered fragments.*]
I've had enough to-day of Frithiof drivel.
His birthday! Pah! [*Seizes* MARTHA's *glass.*]
Here's to the God of War!
Pick up your glass and drink my toast, or go!
I'll not be preached at by a dirty Jew.

BLUM
Ha! dirty Jew—although you had me washed
In Graaf's cathedral font. But it is true.
I never turned a Christian.

CHANCELLOR
What! You mocked!

BLUM
Mocked you, your Church, and most of all, myself.
Had Christians handled us with Christliness,
There would not be a single Jew in Europe.
We should have melted in your love as I
Have melted in Count Frithiof's. Since, however,
You Gothians shut us out from every post,
Dishonour is our only door to honour.
I knew your weakness for converting Jews,
So played upon it.

CHANCELLOR
Lying, faithless dog
I from the Ghetto raised to Christian knighthood!

BLUM
The world's your puppet, why not make you mine?

CHANCELLOR
And I have loved you as a second son.
But what's your lovelessness for me beside
Your blasphemy before the throne of Christ!

BLUM
Whose blasphemy was greater, yours or mine—
I, the pretended, you, the self-thought Christian,
Usurping God's place, using men as pawns,
And ending by believing *your* plans *His?*

CHANCELLOR
God's word and hand have always guided me.
This you should know who day by day have sat——

BLUM
And squirmed to see your Christless soul perpending
Such giant crimes as needs must crucify
Afresh my gentle ancestor.

CHANCELLOR
What crimes ?

BLUM
Whate'er I touch incriminates you. Look !
[*Picks up cypher telegram.*]
Man wins the realm of air and might have been
An eagle with a soul ; you make him harpy,
More murderous than dragons of the ooze.
I tell you, we outsiders see the game,
We Jews, who bidden rise *beyond* the code
Of eye for eye, must rub both eyes to see
Not e'en eye-justice done in Christendom,
Whose cannons thunder 'gainst both God and Christ.

CHANCELLOR
Enough ! The cannon is the *voice* of God !
But how should you Jew-skulkers understand
Whose only god is gold !

BLUM
Indeed ! Then take
My savings.
[*Unlocks his desk and pulls out an uncounted heap of black volumes.*]

CHANCELLOR
Eh ? What's this ?

BLUM

My diary!

[*Raining the books on the table all through his speech.*]

The fruit of years of patient penmanship,
Volume on volume of your private talk
To set all Europe blazing and to loose
Such hordes of stinging insects round your head
As would avenge your insults to my race.
But as a faithful Frithian I forgo
Revenge and gold alike.

CHANCELLOR [*Occupied in examining one*]

You Judas!

BLUM

Ay,
Peruse them carefully before you burn,
And having seen yourself as I have seen you,
Repent, and in your turn become a Frithian!

CHANCELLOR [*Absorbed in diary*]

You camel! Here's my jest about the Queen
Set down in serious earnest.

BLUM

As I said,
The book would ruin you, if published.

CHANCELLOR

Viper!

BLUM

I too should come off ill, unedited.
I've taken many a bribe to mould your mind

And, though I've often failed—or failed to try,
Yet often too I've reigned in Gothia.

CHANCELLOR
Reigned, Ghetto-brat ?

BLUM
You ruled his Majesty,
And *I* ruled you, and so the Ghetto-brat
Has been the sovereign of Gothia.

CHANCELLOR
She-devil's spawn !
[*Throws book on fire.*]

BLUM
But now, thank God, a Frithian,
And waiting *your* conversion.
[*Lays his badge significantly on the table.*]

CHANCELLOR
Back to hell !

BLUM [*Smiling*]
I will await you.

CHANCELLOR
Do you mock at me ?
Another word, I fling you through the window.

BLUM
I know these rages.

CHANCELLOR

Do you ? Then by God !——

[*Flings open the casement. A chant is heard from without as of men moving solemnly.*]

"*Miserere, Domine,*
Take his spirit unto Thee ! "

What's that ?

BLUM

White Frithians carrying a brother—
I know the voices.

CHANCELLOR

May they chant for you !

BLUM

That day may I be worthy of a grave
Upon yon snow-peak, where the Master lies
[*Menacingly*] By your connivance.
[*Softening*]
God be with you, friend.

[*Exit.*]

CHANCELLOR

Damned Jew ! Thank God I have a real son !

[*The procession chants louder, as if passing under the window. He bangs the casement to.*]

O stop your squallings ! I must make a law
Against alfresco howlings. . . .

[*Looks at the diaries.*]

Heap of filth !
You'll choke my grate up. Martha ! Where is Martha ?

Am I deserted, then, by all the world ?

[*Throws open housekeeper's door.* MARTHA *appears with tragic face.*]

Ah, Martha ! Throw those books—— What's wrong ?

MARTHA

O master !

They bring it here.

[*Trembles all over.*]

CHANCELLOR

Bring what here ? Speak, you silly !

MARTHA

The coffin !

CHANCELLOR

Eh ? Their coffin ? Are you crazy ?

I'll see to it. . . . Go, gather up those books

And throw them all upon your kitchen fire.

[*He closes the ante-room door on her with a nervous bang.*]

MARTHA

O God in heaven ! whom can they be bringing ?

[*The chant is heard now from the ante-room, with the tramp of feet.*]

"*Miserere, Domine,*

Hallowed through eternity."

[*The sound is heard as of a heavy coffin being deposited on the floor. Then a terrible cry.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Without*]
My son!

MARTHA [*Shrieking*]
It's Osric!

[*She falls half-fainting against the table. There is a sound of talk and of a coffin being lifted again, the chant recommences.*]

"*Miserere, Domine,*
Take his spirit unto Thee."

[*Chant fades away. Twilight has gradually fallen in the room. A slow dragging footstep is heard, and the* CHANCELLOR, *ashen and looking years older, but holding his head erect, re-enters.*]

MARTHA [*Sobbing*]
O master! I——

CHANCELLOR
Why have you not obeyed me?
Gather those books and make a kitchen bonfire.

MARTHA
O Excellence——

CHANCELLOR
Those books, I say!

[*She heaps them up in her arms. As she is going out, sobbing silently, he says gently*]

And do not go
To Osric's room. . . . He lies there in a box.
A proper coffin will arrive to-morrow.

MARTHA
O Osric, little——

CHANCELLOR
Silence! He has sinned—
Slunk from his post ere God relieved his guard,
And with the sword he held in trust for Heaven
Spirted his life-blood in his Maker's face.
Unconsecrated ground will take his body.
We are cut off from him eternally.

MARTHA
O God, have mercy on him!

CHANCELLOR
And us all!
Now leave me. I must work for Gothia!
[*Sits at table.*]

MARTHA [*At exit, sobbing*]
Poor Osric!

CHANCELLOR
Oh, and Martha! Send the Jew
Any of his belongings lying here.
I'll not replace him—I'm too old for strangers.
[*With faint tremulous smile.*]
We shall be all alone, you see, we two.

MARTHA [*Coming to him*]
O Master!

CHANCELLOR [*Stroking her hand*]
Loyal Martha ! . . . But to work !
If I am childless, yet I have my country,
My Gothia, God be thanked ! to make yet greater.
These next few weeks I must be very busy.
You shall arouse me every morn at five ;
Long winter evenings, too, are coming soon.

MARTHA [*Drying her eyes*]
You'll want your lamp already——

CHANCELLOR [*Sweetly*]
If you please.

[*Exit* MARTHA. *He slips off his coat and gets with painful slowness into his old dressing-gown, sits and rummages at table and stares at a paper.* MARTHA *re-enters with lighted lamp and draws the curtains.*]

Ah, that is better ! . . . Now let none disturb me
Unless they come about the funeral.

[MARTHA *goes out silently. The* CHANCELLOR *writes feverishly.* MARTHA *re-enters.*]

What now ?

MARTHA
The Duke of Pomberg——

CHANCELLOR [*Starting up*]
Graveyard ghoul !
By God, he shall not rise on Osric's body !
Say I am not at home.

MARTHA

He knows you are!
And bears a message from his Majesty.

CHANCELLOR

His gracious Majesty? How good of him
With such precipitance to soothe my grief!
[*Wipes his eyes for the first time.*]
Our royal house was ever strong in heart,
If weak in will; and that's the better thing,
For we, its servants, can supply the will,
While hearts are irreplaceable. . . . I'll see him.

MARTHA

But not like that.
[*Points to dressing-gown.*]

CHANCELLOR

Oh, let me be!
[*Exit* MARTHA. *He sits, with heaving shoulders.* MARTHA *shows in* POMBERG, *and exit.*]

POMBERG

Ah, Count!
Believe me how my heart is rent for you.
At such a moment I had not intruded
But for my duty to my sovereign.

CHANCELLOR [*Tremulously, on the brink of fresh tears*]

I thank his Majesty for his condolence,
And you for bringing it.

POMBERG

I beg your pardon ?
His Majesty as yet is unaware——

CHANCELLOR [*Changing from tears to thunder*]
Then what in hell—— ?

POMBERG

Respect your sovereign,
And me his designated Chancellor.

CHANCELLOR
What ? What ?

POMBERG

I did not mean to be so curt.
'Twas your own grossness forced me to the point.
His Majesty, considerate and gracious,
Permits you to resign.

[*The* CHANCELLOR *leaps up as if stung*]

I said, resign !

[*The* CHANCELLOR *subsides into his chair, his head sinks lower and lower as* POMBERG *proceeds, but he replies only by grunts, which* POMBERG *interprets as words*]

I may not *wholly* fill the giant gap,
But this at least I bring my sovran lord,
More loyal service. . . . Nay, the game is up !
He knows you lulled him with your peaceful purrings
While bent to stake all Gothia's gains and glories
Upon a mad adventure. . . . *What* adventure ?

Invading Alba ! Do not waste your breath
To contradict your henchman's diary.

[*Throws diary on table. The* CHANCELLOR, *who is by now curled into a crumpled ball, lets an articulate grunt escape him.*]

CHANCELLOR

The Judas !

POMBERG

'Twas not we that paid the silver.
The Lady Norna dropped this when she swooned—
Doubtless at reading of the war you brew.
I marvel only that his Majesty
Did not faint too—but he was too inflamed
By your profanities toward his person,
Your japes that spared not e'en his sacred consort.
Yet, in a nigh divine forbearance, he
Still leaves to you the option of resigning ;
And I, though still more scurrilously handled,
Now match the royal magnanimity
By counsel you should use poor Osric's death
As cloak to cover your retirement.

CHANCELLOR [*Leaping up, thunderously*]

No !

By God, he shall dismiss me ! Let men know
That after I have given soul and brain,
And night and day and happiness itself,
To feed the splendour of his royal house,
And borne the burden of his people's hate,
And fronted all the world's malignancy,
And tamed his immemorial rival, Hunland,

And left an Empire where I found a jungle,
He "sacks" me as one "sacks" a thieving valet,
Or as I turn his cringing envoy out.
[*Throws open door of ante-room.*]

POMBERG [*Going*]
I will report your answer to him.
[*Outside the door he turns and glares back at the* CHANCELLOR. *Exit slamming the door. The* CHANCELLOR *collapses.*]

CHANCELLOR
God!
Now Gothia's glory gutters and goes out,
Leaving a stink behind. Two popinjays
Replacing Holk and me. O God, my country!
But I must work.
[*Sits at desk. His quill drops from his fingers and falls on the floor.*]
What work have I to do?
All's dark, without a ray.
[*Turning out lamp*]
Out, my old companion!
Grow dark with me—we both are useless now.
[*The lamp goes out. Only the fire throws a red glow. A fainter illumination comes from the perpetual light under his wife's picture. His head sinks forward on the table. The door of the little staircase opens silently and* LADY NORNA *appears at the head of the stairs, pistol in hand. She wears a red cross pinned on her dress.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Without raising his head*]
Who's there ?

NORNA [*Covering him with her pistol*]
Death !

CHANCELLOR
Death ?
[*He looks up quickly, then wheels his chair round and faces her*]
Humph ! Lady Norna !
Who let you in ?

NORNA
Myself.

CHANCELLOR
But how ? Which door ?

NORNA
As death comes mostly, by the private staircase.

CHANCELLOR
Why would you murder me ?

NORNA
My Red Cross shows
I am a servant of humanity.
Unless I kill you now, you mean to drag
The flower of our youth to die in Alba.

CHANCELLOR
Alas ! This glorious death I cannot give them.
I am no longer Chancellor, dear lady.

NORNA [*Startled, then coming down to him*]
You will not save your life by stratagems.
I know your ways—I've read Blum's diary.

CHANCELLOR
You have not read it then with understanding
If you believe I'd lie for *such*-like trifles.
How often have I longed to cast off life
Like this soiled dressing-gown and creep to bed!
But I have never been so tired as now.

NORNA
This crafty whine will not impose on me.

CHANCELLOR
You've come to kill me? What is left to kill?
Ha! Ha! A little naked scuttling spider! . . .
Who called me that? Ah, yes, 'twas Frithiof!
And—ha! a light leaps through this darkness—*you*
It was who killed him.

NORNA
Yes.

CHANCELLOR
My one mistake!
I thought 'twas Konrad by his strange conversion.
Well, that's a faint relief—for I could never
Have let my Osric wed a murderess,
Even if he had lived.

NORNA
If he had lived! [*Her hand shakes*]
No! No! You shall not spoil my aim with lies!

CHANCELLOR
You say I lie—'tis Osric lies—[*chuckles piteously*]—he! he!
You do not see the jest? Within his coffin!
His bosom bears a gash he made to prove
Through what a petty chink the soul can fly.
Go to his room—I meant for nuptial chamber—
You'll find *him* lying—[*chuckles*]—he! he! he!—not *me!*

NORNA
I will not go—until I see *you* lying!
Then with my last shot I will go to him.
O Osric! dearest Osric! very soon.

CHANCELLOR [*Ignoring her*]
They told me he had died an hour ago,
But when I raised the lid and saw his face
I felt he had been dead a million years,
Such infinite of silence lay between us.
Never to speak to me—ah, God!—again,
Never to smile with those great gentle eyes—
[*Sobs aloud for the first time.*]

NORNA [*Approaching him*]
Oh, hush! Count, hush!

CHANCELLOR
When he was one year old
I used to hear him croon himself to sleep—

Did you know babies croon like that ? To-night
He did not croon before he went to sleep,
But cursing me who made him false to Frithiof——

NORNA
No ! no ! 'twas me he cursed, my dreadful deed. . . .
But what is one man's life ? Your son is dead.
You killed a hundred thousand sons of others.

CHANCELLOR
Yes, come to think, there must have been their fathers.
A hundred thousand—did you say ?—like me ?
And I dared put myself in place of God ?
No—some one else said that ! Ah, yes, the Jew.
You too, poor child, would play at Providence !
But Life's too big and tangled for our meddlings.

NORNA
I *must* work out your doom and mine. What else
In such a tragic maze remains to do ?
[*Takes aim again.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Ignoring pistol*]
I'm glad at least his mother did not live
To see him in that box—she was so tender.
She could not bear it when he fought in Hunland,
And of the fear that he would die she died.

NORNA
How like *my* mother !

CHANCELLOR [*Laying his hand paternally on her shoulder*]

Ah! You see her picture
Upon the mantel—but her eyes were softer,
The same as Osric's. . . .

[*With sudden exultant cry as both are gazing at the picture*]

Ah, *she* will redeem him!
God cannot torture her by banning him
To outer darkness. No, for here on earth
My angel had so little happiness.
She felt, far more than I, the flaming hate
With which the People rings the souls that serve it.
Then too my work and journeys parted us
Long months and years; but all is o'er, thank God!
To-night we'll meet again—all three together.
And I was thinking I had still so long
To wait and wait . . . such empty, endless years!

NORNA [*Lowering pistol*]
We are condemned—to live!

CHANCELLOR [*In convulsive protest*]

To live?

NORNA

God help us!

[*She goes out by the ante-chamber with bent head and dragging steps. The* CHANCELLOR *drops back wearily on his chair. The glow of the fire has almost died down. Suddenly a sound of soft choral singing of men and women, led by a rich male voice, surges up from the street. He lifts his head and listens. The*

procession of Frithians approaches nearer and nearer, thousands of tramping feet.]

FRITHIANS [*Singing without*]

Frithiof is risen,
The Prophet of Love;
Earth laughs beneath us
And Heaven above.

[*The* CHANCELLOR *rises and flings open the casement. The room is flooded with moonlight and triumphant choral song, while on high shine the stars and afar on the horizon loom the snow-peaks, recalling the death of* FRITHIOF. *The* CHANCELLOR *stands gazing out into the night while the procession passes.*]

Green lie the valleys,
No more to be red,
Love shall be living
And War shall be dead.

Death shall be sated,
Destruction be gorged,
Hell shall recover
The cannons she forged.

Rulers of iron
To splinters are hurled.
Laugh, O ye mothers,
Your babes rule the world.

Deaf men shall hear it,
Shall see it, the blind.
Hail to all peoples
And peace to mankind!

Frithiof is risen,
The Prophet of Love;
Earth laughs beneath us
And Heaven above.

[*The music is passing away in an exquisite peace as the curtain slowly falls.*]

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